I SAVED TOO MANY GIRLS AND CAUSED THE LITTLE APOCALYPSE

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"Are you Rekka Namidare?"
This girl suddenly appeared in front of me — floating upside down in the air.

Alien Space Princess
IRIS FINERITAS CYPHERCALL
Wh-what's going on? Wait, his hand...
I should've just told him I liked him in middle school...
Rekka's Childhood Friend
SATSUKI OTOMO
Sorcerer from Another World
HARISSA HOPE
"Hero!"

"This ends now!"
I turned my hands around and swung the Hero's Sword once more.

CHARACTERS

REKKA NAMIDARE

Just started high school. Thanks to the Namidare bloodline, he keeps getting invovled with girls that are in trouble.

IRIS FINERITAS CYPHERCALL

An alien space princess. When it looked like she was going to be forced into an arranged marriage, she escaped to Earth.

SATSUKI OTOMO

In her first year of high school. She is the girl-next-door childhood friend, and heir to the Omniscient Magic.

A demi-material being sent from the future in order to get Rekka together with a girl.

HARISSA HOPE

A sorcerer from another world. She summoned Rekka as a hero to defeat the Demon Overlord.

Prologue 0-1: Satsuki Otomo

The Omniscient Magic.

It was a powerful spell that enabled one to access the Akashic record, and learn everything there is to know about this world's mysteries. Mages had whispered of its existence for generations. If it was real, it would enable someone to save the world, to destroy it, or to rule it. Its power was such that some laughed at the very idea of its existence.

But the whispers remained, down the long generations, along with another rumor: that there was a family of mages who inherited that spell. And at this very moment, the young female heir to that clan of mages was unsure of what to do.

Her name was Satsuki Otomo. Tomorrow, she would turn sixteen. That was a very important age for her family. Her clan, which handed the great Omniscient Magic down through the generations, carried a powerful protective spell to keep their bloodline from dying out.

It was called the Omniscient Contract. Whoever kissed Satsuki under the sign of that contract would become her partner for life. Simply put, the contract ensured that their bloodline would be carried on.

This might not seem to be a problem, but it was. Whoever she made the contract with would be able to use the Omniscient Magic, just like her. And this important contract could only be sealed when a mage was sixteen years old.

So, as you've just learned, the Omniscient Magic was a double-edged sword. If she chose the wrong partner, it could destroy the world. And in every era, there was no shortage of evil men who wished to use it for their own purposes.

To protect the great magic from those people, Satsuki's clan had hidden themselves with layer after layer of disguises and deceits. But a short while ago, a man had appeared who'd seen through their disguises and learned their true identity.

His name was Messiah Kyandistrapps. He was the strongest mage of the modern era. The rumors said that not only was he a powerful mage, but he was greedy for knowledge, and even worse, a serious show-off. If a man like that acquired the Omniscient Magic, terrible things would happen.

Her parents had gone to fight Messiah, to protect her and the great magic. But they wouldn't be able to do more than buy a little bit of time.

Satsuki herself had mostly mastered spells that would help her flee from combat, like teleportation and levitation. But Messiah's magical power was so much greater than hers that even if she could elude him, it would only be for a day or two. She couldn't keep it up. A day or two was, in fact, the absolute most she could hope for.

Her parents had passed the great magic on to her when she was born, and now she was the only one capable of accessing the Akashic record. She could only make a contract with one person, too. Messiah would doubtless do whatever it took to become that person. A mage of his skill had any number of ways of forcing her to make the contract. Her only choice now was to make the contract with someone else, before he could find her.

Satsuki rubbed her eyes to stop the tears from forming. She would've preferred a real romance. She would've liked to go through all the steps, and slowly built up a relationship of love, and only then reveal her secret, which he would then accept.

But time wouldn't wait for that. Messiah wouldn't wait for that.

She continued her letter, making sure that her tears didn't fall onto the paper.

I should've just told him I liked him in middle school. But it's too late for that now, she thought. Again and again her tears would stain the words, and each time she'd start over on a new sheet of paper.

By dawn, the letter was done, and she wrote his name on the envelope. "Rekka Namidare," it said.

Prologue 0-2: Iris Fineritas Cyphercall

“Sheesh! Just when I’d finally escaped to this planet in the middle of nowhere!” Iris cursed as she looked behind her.

There were two shadows following her, jumping from rooftop to rooftop like Superman.

The pursuers were from her home planet, Finerita. They wore sunglasses and tuxedos, and at a glance, looked similar to the natives of this planet— Earthlings, they were called. But they had horse-like tails poking out from their behinds, which showed that they weren’t actually from this planet at all.

Of course, Iris had a similar tail of her own. She was an alien, too. Not only was she an alien, she was the heir to the rulership of Finerita. But now she was running away from home.

The reason was simple: she didn’t like the man her father had asked her to marry. More specifically, it hadn’t been a request. She was being sold off to the ruler of a much larger nation. Her own desires didn’t matter at all.

She’d told her father that there was no way she was going through with it. She’d done a random warp in her own personal spaceship, and finally escaped all the way out here to this distant planet. But the pursuers were right behind her. Her father had seemingly known exactly where she was going to go.

But that didn’t mean she was going to let them catch her. Iris ran. She ran desperately. But finally, she landed hard on the roof of an old building, and plunged through a rotted plank.

“Eeyaaaah!” When she landed, a huge cloud of dirt and dust flew up, blinding both her and her pursuers. She cursed again as the dust clung to her body.

And then she saw a boy. “This way! Let’s get out of here!”

“Huh?” Inside a cloud of dust that wouldn’t let her see more than ten centimeters in front of her face, he grabbed her hand and ran.

It was so sudden, she didn't know how to react. Still, she let him lead her out of the building.

He was an Earthling, she gathered. And it seemed that he'd saved her, too.

Wh-What's going on? Wait, his hand... Even if he was an alien, he was a boy, and this was her first time touching a boy's hand. As he led her away, she could feel her cheeks flush and her heart beat faster.

The boy led her away for a while... and finally, he stopped and began to pant for breath. It seemed that Earthlings were much weaker than Fineritans, but she had no intention of leaving him to flee further away.

"H-Hey... What's your name?" For some reason, her voice was cold and brusque. He was still holding her hand, and she was feeling very embarrassed.

The boy said that his name was Rekka Namidare.

Prologue 0-3: Harissa Hope

The Seventh Anti-Demon Overlord Expeditionary Force had failed, just like all the others before it. Men, arrows, magic... Nothing could break the barrier surrounding the Demon Overlord's island, and the demons he'd summoned tore the army apart.

The Overlord's armies were appearing all over the land, causing chaos wherever they went. The kingdom no longer had the strength left to oppose him. That's why everyone was hoping for the return of the hero of legend.

"A-A-A-A-All right, I will now b-b-b-begin the cross-world summoning!" Harissa's voice shook terribly as she stood there, clad in wizard's robes. The king and his chief minister stood in front of her, and to the side stood his other advisors and the military's leaders. She was expected to pull off the magical feat of the century in front of all of them. It was a legendary ritual passed down in the royal family which would summon a hero from another world.

I... I... I have to make this work! Harissa gripped her staff with both hands, and green magical energy poured from its tip into the summoning circle. If she poured enough magic into the circle that it went critical, a hero would appear from another world to defeat the Demon Overlord. At least, in theory. If the royal family's legends were right.

Aw... I'm starting to think I can't do this. There was a reason that Harissa had to make this summoning succeed, no matter what, but as she looked at the unchanging summoning circle, she started to get nervous.

But she couldn't stop pouring in energy. Suddenly, as she prayed, the circle began to shine.

The magical energy turned from a flickering green into a dazzling light, which spread through the royal throne room.

"Wh-What's going on?!"

"What did you do, Harissa Hope?!"

“I... I just did what you told me!” For half a minute or so, the room was filled with sobs and angry yells.

The light coming from the circle suddenly stopped, and in its center sat a boy who hadn’t been there a moment ago.

That was the one change— there was now a boy in the center of the circle.

“Huh? What? Where am I?” He looked around in confusion.

His clothes were of a strange sort that you would find nowhere on the continent.

All the important men started to trade suspicious glances and doubts.

“A foreigner?”

“A boy?”

“Have you ever seen him before?”

“Another world?”

“Was he summoned?”

“Success?”

Their thoughts all came together into a single answer.

“A hero?”

“A hero!”

Harissa, the one who had summoned him, leaped forward before anyone else could.

She ran up and hugged the boy, who was still standing there in confusion There were tears of joy in her eyes, and she looked at him with admiration and awe. He was an ordinary-looking boy, but to her, he was the most handsome man she’d ever seen.

“Huh? Wh-Why are you crying?”

“Hero! What is your name?” She cut him off before he could finish. She already sounded like a girl dreaming of a prince on a white horse.

He stammered out a response, looking a little overwhelmed.

“My name’s Rekka Namidare, but... where am I?”

Prologue 1: Starting Today, I'm...

Today's my sixteenth birthday.

It's also the day I start high school.

Right now, I'm sitting in the middle of the opening ceremony. It started thirty minutes ago. Just like the ones in middle school, it was unimaginably boring, but I still managed to force myself to look interested and studious.

Only a few moments ago, a girl had appeared in front of me. She had blue, shoulder-length hair.

She was tiny, with a childish face. She looked to be in her first year of middle school, or maybe younger. She was wearing a uniform like the Japanese army ones I'd seen in textbooks, and she was staring at me with a dead serious look on her face— while she floated upside down in the air.

"Are you Rekka Namidare?" For some reason, she knew my name.

Who was this girl? And wait, why was she floating? I'd been waving my hands in confusion, and the boy wearing glasses who sat next to me was staring at me suspiciously. It felt like only I could see or hear her.

"My name is R. You can call me Arlie if you want." The girl began to introduce herself, even though I hadn't asked her name. And she was a little too friendly.

Wait. Hold on a second.

Question: Who was this girl, R? A hallucination? A delusion? A... ghost? I didn't want to be seeing any of those, and if I was, it was bad news. This was a big problem, but I was in the middle of the opening ceremony for school. I had to sit up straight and look serious, whether I wanted to or not. Otherwise I'd end up sticking out.

I didn't like sticking out. My motto was, "Normal is best."

Normal is best in all things.

Some people might say normal is boring, but if you asked me, I'd tell you that

those people didn't know what normal meant. A normal life had time for hobbies, or for playing with friends. Was there anybody who didn't like hanging out with their friends? If you insisted on being different from other people, you lost out on things like that.

Which meant that being normal was the best way to be happy.

"Hello? Can you hear me?" And now, something that was threatening to shatter my normality into a million pieces was waving its hand right in front of my face.

"Hello? Sir Namidare? Hmm, is that a little too formal? Rekka? Does that not work, either?" No, first name basis is about as informal as you can get. It's not that I can't hear you. It's that I'm ignoring you. And why are you so friendly, anyway?

"All right, dung beetle! Can you hear me? Answer me, damn it!" Who are you calling a dung beetle? That's quite the downgrade. Did I do something? Did I do something that would make you call me a dung beetle? I did not! No... don't give in. Hang in there! If you scream, that's just what she wants.

"Hey, you've got a nose hair sticking out," R said, as she pointed at my nose.

Huh? Seriously? I moved my hand to my face without thinking.

"Not your right side. Your left. Your left." Left, huh? Got it. I need to yank it out before someone notices... Wait, there's nothing there?!

"I lied. And you fell for it!"

"Are you trying to pick a fight with me or something?!" I blurted out.

"So you can hear me, after all."

"Oh." Crap.

Then things got worse. "You, new student. Who are you picking a fight with?" said a teacher. The principal, the entire student body, and even the parents were staring at me.

Aahh! "N-No, it's nothing."

"Sit down. Now."

“Yes, sir...” It hurt to have them all looking at me. I felt like I could die of shame. In fact, I wished I would. My head felt like it was about to reach its boiling point.

“Well, I knew you could hear me when you put your hand to your nose.” This little brat! It was all I could do to keep from screaming.

“Since I’ve succeeded in making first contact, I’d like to get right to the point. Is that all right?” It wasn’t, but if I ignored her, who knew what she’d do?

Was there a way to talk to her without standing out? Maybe there was. I took my cell phone out of my pocket and opened the text message screen.

Tap-tap-tap-tap. **“Who are you?”** I typed in a message, and then motioned for R to read it.

She spun around in mid-air and looked down at my hands.

“This is quite an old communications device, isn’t it?” Old? I’d just traded in my phone for a new one not too long ago.

“I guess that’s natural, though. I’ve come from the future, after all.”

The future? **“Did you just say the future?”**

“That’s correct. I’m from the future.” The future... seriously?

I decided to put aside my confusion and start asking questions.

“Can anybody but me see you?”

“No. Only you can see and touch me, Rekka.”

“I can touch you?”

“Correct. And I can’t touch or speak to anyone but you. I am what’s called a demi-material being. Would you like a complicated explanation of what that means?”

“...”

“I don’t think the ‘...’ merits being typed out.” I ignored her and asked the biggest question on my mind.

“What do you want with me?”

“I’ve come to save the future. I’ve come to change the future that’s been ruined by you and the Namidare bloodline,” R said.

I had ruined the future? My goal in life was to be normal, so it was hard to see me having any effect on the future.

But I had some small idea of what she might be talking about. My father had told me about my blood— the Namidare bloodline.

That had just happened yesterday.

▽

The previous evening, the Namidare household was filled with the sound of noisemakers.

“Happy birthday, Rekka! Yahoo!”

“Don’t point those things at me. And don’t say ‘yahoo,’ Dad.”

“Boo! You’re so boring, Rekka!”

This idiot, who was far too old to be puffing his cheeks out like an angry squirrel, was my dad, Jigen Namidare. He was a stay-at-home dad with a beard who looked best in an apron. All the delicious-smelling food on the dining room table was stuff he’d made. Even the cake was homemade, which I thought was honestly pretty impressive. I wished he hadn’t written “Rekka, I love you!” in chocolate icing on the cake, though.

“All right, let’s start eating.”

“Mom’s not here yet.”

“Mom’s busy getting ready for tomorrow. So she says we can start without her.”

“I see.” He was probably talking about her job transfer tomorrow.

My mom was a talented career woman, and she’d been given the honor of transferring to her company’s HQ outside Japan. Since she was congenitally incapable of doing any chores on her own, Dad had decided to go with her, but I’d decided I was going to stay in Japan. Part of it was just that I wanted to try living on my own. Fortunately, my parents had both agreed.

My birthday was actually tomorrow, but for that reason, we were holding the party tonight.

“Want me to put the candles on the cake?”

“No way.” Blowing out birthday candles was a little too childish for me. And it was kind of lame, just having your birthday with your family.

“Did you not invite Satsuki this year?” I asked.

“That’s right. She wanted to come, but I had something important to talk to you about, so I said no.”

“Hmph.”

“Oh? Are you lonely without her?”

“Huh?! A-Absolutely not! Just, you know... We’ve always had our birthdays together, so it feels a little weird.” We’d had our birthdays together for the past ten years. Of course it felt weird.

“Oh, yeah?”

“Shut up. Stop grinning.”

“Right, right. Sorry!”

Why did my dad always like to screw around like this? I didn’t hate the guy or anything, but I wished he’d grow up a little.

I was a little curious about what he meant by “something important,” though.

“So, what did you want to talk about?”

“Hmm... yeah. I guess I should tell you.” Dad chewed on a bit of parsley as he began to talk.

“We Namidares have a special bloodline, you see.”

“A special bloodline?”

“Yeah. I guess you could call it the Namidare bloodline. Whenever a Namidare boy turns sixteen, he becomes... well, something special. Something a little unusual.”

“This is the first I’ve heard of this. It makes me sound like the hero of a manga

or light novel or something.”

“You’re pretty sharp, Rekka.”

I had been joking, actually, but for some reason he gave me a compliment. What was sharp about that?

“This special something makes you rather like the hero of a manga or light novel.”

“Do I turn 2D or something?”

“I kind of wish I got the chance to do that. You might not be able to come back if you did, though.”

“My head hurts...” At this point, I decided my dad was just making things up.

“So what is our ‘bloodline,’ exactly?” I asked, intending to mostly ignore him. The trick to achieving a happy family life was not just telling him to shut up.

“It’s hard to explain, meow.”

“Don’t say ‘meow.’ It’s creepy.”

“I’m trying to be creepy-cute! So anyway, it could be manga or a light novel. Just imagine a story where a demon kidnaps a princess, and a prince comes to save her.”

“A story?”

“That’s right. But let’s say that in the story, the prince loses in battle to the demon. Or let’s say he never existed. What would happen to that story, you think?”

“A bad ending, right?”

“That’s right. And when that happens, we Namidares get called into the story to take the hero’s place. That’s just one example. A story can be any kind of weirdness that we find ourselves in.”

“A story, huh?” It was a little abstract, but I got what he was saying.

“Basically, our bloodline has a tendency to get caught up in strange things. Also, we have a tendency to run into aliens, psychics, and people from the future, nyo.”

“Don’t say ‘nyo,’ either. And I don’t know anybody like that.” I didn’t want to get caught up in any stories, anyway. Not that any of it seemed in the least bit plausible.

“But...” As I chewed the lettuce in my salad, I thought to myself... If this was true, I’d just run away and leave the story behind. If I was just a bystander who was getting caught up in it, that meant it was supposed to be somebody else’s problem, right? So I wasn’t really obligated to help anybody. And no way in hell was I going to.

“Sounds pretty rough.”

“Hahaha! You don’t believe me at all, do you?”

“What, did you really expect me to believe that? If it was true, wouldn’t you be off creating world peace right now or something?” I looked at my dad, who was chowing down on a chicken wing. He was clearly nothing but an ordinary stay-at-home dad.

“It depends on the individual, but from the records our ancestors left behind, it seems like once you become an adult, the ‘stories’ stop coming for you.”

“That sounds pretty convenient for you.”

“You don’t trust me, huh? Well, that’s fine. Once you find yourself caught up in a story, you’ll have no choice but to believe. So anyway, get ready for that to start tomorrow.”

“Sure, okay.” Were we finally done?

Well, it was a pretty entertaining way to spice up a birthday. I could give him that.

“Oh, there’s one more thing.”

“There’s more?”

“Yeah. This is important.” My dad put down his chopsticks.

I looked up from my food to see what was up, and saw my dad had a surprisingly serious expression on his face. I sat up straight without even thinking about it.

“A lot of really difficult things are about to happen to you. We’re just normal people, so we can’t solve all the problems like a real hero could. If you think your life is in danger, it’s okay to run. But... I don’t want you to just give up on the stories you find unfolding around you. Can you promise your dad that?” I hadn’t seen him looking this serious in a long time.

When I was still a little kid, I’d once found a cat in a cardboard box that was floating down a flooded river. While I stood there panicking, my dad ripped off his shirt and jumped into the water without a second thought. Then he’d taken the sick cat to the vet, and once it was better, he’d run all over our neighborhood trying to find it a home. To a kid like me, he looked like a hero.

“Yeah, I’ve got it. I don’t know if I can be the hero of a story, though.” Maybe I’d remembered how he’d seemed to me back then, because I nodded.

I still thought this whole bloodline thing was a joke of my dad’s, though.

My mom finished her packing for tomorrow and came into the dining room.

“Hey, guys!”

It might be weird for me to say this, but my mom was really pretty. She was often mistaken for being a decade younger than she really was. I had no idea how my dad had managed to land someone like that.

“You’re late, hon! The food’s almost gone! And I worked so hard to make it, too!”

“I’m late because I’ve been doing all your packing, Jigen.”

“You were the one who said you wanted to do it.”

“And I said that because if I let you do it, your stuff wouldn’t have fit in the trunk.”

“Hahaha, sorry.”

Mom sat down, and we all started to talk. It was our last night together, so we talked for a long time. I forgot all about the stuff Dad had said about the Namidare bloodline.

▽

Why was R talking about the stuff my dad said? **“What gives you the right to talk about my bloodline?”**

“You’re the person most responsible for causing the War of All. I’ve researched you and everything else concerning the Namidare bloodline.”

I don’t get any privacy, huh? Wait, more importantly...

“What’s the War of All?”

“Just what the name implies. A war that involves everything. I’m unable to tell you most of the details.”

“Why?”

“Because they’re deeply connected to my mission.”

“Saving the future, was it?”

“Yes. Your father, Jigen Namidare, told you about the Namidare bloodline, right?”

“Yeah.”

“At this point, I expect you don’t fully believe it. But please understand, before I continue, that everything you heard is true.” R seated herself in a formal pose in mid-air.

“In the future I came from, Rekka Namidare was involved in many stories, and saved many, many girls at the center of them. Heroines, you might call them.”

“Heroines?”

“Princesses of fantasy kingdoms, mysterious transfer students, that sort of thing. Almost every story has a heroine, right?”

Well, that was probably true.

“By the way, Rekka.”

“?”

“You’re indecisive, and you don’t know how to deal with girls, do you?”

“Bwah?!” Where did that come from? I almost yelled. The boy in glasses next to me was looking at me funny.

“W-Well, I guess I’ve never had a girlfriend. Does that matter?”

“Of course it does. In the future, you will save countless heroines, and cause them all to fall in love with you. But you never actually *do* anything about it. In the end, the girls you ignored will start a massive war over you, the War of All.”

“Really?”

“Really. Otherwise I wouldn’t be here, and the War of All wouldn’t have taken place.”

“Wait a second! He told me that when I grew up, the stories would stop involving me!”

“Even if you’re no longer being caught up in stories, the girls you save don’t simply cease to exist, you know? Nor do their feelings for you. You know, you’re a lucky guy to have all those girls in love with you.”

“…”

“I told you, you don’t actually need to type out the ellipsis.”

I was freaking out so much, I couldn’t think of anything to say. You have to understand, I’ve got a delicate heart.

“Wait, why is there a huge war? It was started by a bunch of girls, right? How did it get so big?”

“You’re very naïve, aren’t you? The records show that you saved several hundred heroines. As I just said, I can’t give you the details, but many of them were involved with the typical sorts of stories you’d see in a manga or light novel. So imagine that. Imagine if all the different characters from all the different manga and light novels started fighting. What would happen?”

“I imagine the earth blowing up about ten times over.”

“Yes. It’s something of a little apocalypse, you might say.”

Of course, I didn’t know that any of this was true. It was all just a hypothetical. But it was a fact that R was right here in front of me.

“I want to make sure you’re not some kind of hologram. Can I touch you?”

“Certainly. Touch me wherever you like.” R subtly stuck out her chest. Did she

want me to touch her there?

“A handshake is fine.”

“As you wish.”

Shake-shake. I was able to touch her. It was true that only I could touch, see, or hear R. Did that mean the stuff about the Namidare bloodline and the War of All was true, too?

“My mission is to bring you and one of the heroines together, and thus end the War of All before it starts. I’ll be watching you every minute of the day until you finish your mission, so hurry up and seduce someone, please.”

“Seduce?!” R’s voice was so calm when she said it that I couldn’t stop myself from shouting.

The boy in glasses next to me, as well as the teachers, were all staring. It hurt.

▽

Except for me embarrassing myself, the entrance ceremony finished without any problems. The new students all went to their classes and introduced themselves, there was a short homeroom class, and then it was time to go home.

“Hey, you said that in the future, I saved people in a bunch of stories, didn’t you? Which means that even if something weird does happen to me, I can’t die, right?”

“You’re an idiot, aren’t you, Rekka?” R sighed from the back of my head. Evidently, she was incapable of moving more than five meters from me, so no matter where I went, she floated along nearby. What would happen when I had to go to the bathroom? “I explained that I came here to change the future, right? The fact that I’m here is already causing that to happen. There’s no guarantee that you’ll be able to help finish the stories like you did in my timeline’s past.”

“Wait. Isn’t that really bad news for me?”

“Well, from the perspective of the people in the future, you’re the one who ruined everything. If you were to just up and die, it would serve you right,

wouldn’t it?”

“I’m not that interested in helping you guys out anymore.” Today was my sixteenth birthday, and my first day of living on my own. And now I was supposed to do my best to save the future, too? All the excitement I’d started to feel at the prospect of my new life was draining away.

“You know, your name makes you sound pretty tough, but you actually look like kind of a wimp. Your looks are pretty average, too. I don’t understand why everyone was so interested in fighting over you.”

“Shut up.” There was always the odd barb mixed into R’s words. Was that her personality? Or maybe...

“Do you hate me enough that you want me to die, too?”

“I couldn’t say. I’m an artificial life form called a Kiklim, created to complete this mission. So while I have knowledge of the future, it doesn’t feel very real to me.”

“An artificial life form, huh?”

“By the way, I’m two years old. If you hit on me, that means you’re a pedophile.”

“Big words for a girl who’s still in diapers.”

“How rude. I may look formal on the outside, but my underwear is surprisingly sexy. Would you like to see?”

“No.”

Still, two years old? Was that why her expression and voice were always so flat? It kind of explained how she seemed a little unbalanced.

“Oh? Rekka, what’s that?” Suddenly she grabbed my head and turned it to the side, as she pointed at a small electronics store on the shopping street. The window display had a row of big-screen TVs that were playing the afternoon news.

“Those are televisions.”

“I know that. My question was about the program.”

“Hmm? It says, ‘Large Power Outage in City, Residents Saw Lightning Fall From Clear Blue Sky.’”

“I can hear the voices as well as you. That’s not my question. Is that one of those so-called news programs?”

“Huh? Is that it? Hmm... Yeah, that’s a news program, right.” I didn’t expect her to ask me what the show was, as opposed to what was on it right now.

“Huh, so that’s a news program. Rekka, please get closer.”

I moved in front of the TV like she asked. R started to examine the TV carefully.

“Are there no TVs in the future?”

“How rude. Of course there are. But even if I know what one is, this is my first time actually seeing one. They’re not needed for my mission, after all.”

“I see.”

R’s calm, composed demeanor was gone. She was staring at the TV with shining eyes. She looked just like a little kid. I didn’t know exactly what a Kiklim was supposed to be, but she was just a normal girl to me.

And she’d never even played with friends, or done anything for herself, too.

It wasn’t fair, I thought.

It was still hard for me to believe, but if what she said was true, and I had ruined the future... why had they entrusted fixing everything to a little girl? She said that’s why she had been created, but that was completely abnormal. Was the future such a mess that something as abnormal as that could happen? If it was, then as far as I was concerned, it wasn’t my problem.

It wasn’t my problem at all.

But it seemed like it was my fault that they’d sent R back into the past. If R couldn’t touch or talk to anybody but me— if I was the only one who could save her— then maybe I couldn’t just abandon her. She was a bit of a brat, but if you considered her age, her behavior wasn’t so bad.

“I’ve got a TV at home. When we get back, you can watch it as much as you want. If there’s a movie or TV show you want to see, I’ll get it from a rental shop for you.” R had been glued to the TV screen, but when she heard my words, she spun around and looked at me.

“Really?”

She still had no real expression on her face. Was I just fooling myself if I thought she looked a little happy? But that was good enough for now. I nodded.

“I’ll be living on my own from now on, so we can have a little party to celebrate. Wait, I guess you can’t eat, can you? I suppose we can get some more DVDs, then.” I thought I was being pretty nice, considering I was a student who didn’t work a part-time job. But for some reason, R was staring at me skeptically.

“Just so we’re clear, I’m not one of the girls you can seduce, okay?” For the first time in my life, I was so shocked by something someone said that I fell down backwards, onto my butt.

“Stop being stupid and let’s go.” I grabbed R by the hand and started to walk. She was floating in the air, so I didn’t feel any weight, but her hand felt warm.

I had a lot of stuff to think about, like the future and the Namidare bloodline. But for now, it seemed my most pressing concern was how I was going to live with my strange new roommate.

So anyway, that’s how R and I met.

That’s how I reluctantly took my first step out of my normal, ordinary life, and into the world of the extraordinary.

I really didn’t want to consider the possibility that I was already up to my neck in it.

Chapter 1: Multiple Starting Lines

1-1: Summoned by a Childhood Friend's Letter

When I went to grab the newspaper out of the mailbox, there was a letter inside of it, too.

"Huh?"

"Is something wrong?" asked R.

"No, but... there's a letter here for me. And it doesn't have a stamp?" Had the sender put it directly into my mailbox? But who would do that? "Let's see, who's the sender... Wait, it's from Satsuki?"

"Someone you know?"

"Childhood friend. Wait, why wasn't she at school today?" That was strange for her.

I fiddled with the letter in my hands as I opened the front door and took off my shoes.

"Is this Satsuki the sort of delinquent who'd skip the first day of school?"

"No, the exact opposite. In middle school, she was the student council president."

"Huh. That's certainly odd, isn't it?"

"You sound like you know something about it."

"That's not true at all. Why would you think such a thing?"

That bugged me a little... but for now, I needed to read the letter. I tossed my bookbag on the living room sofa and tore open the envelope. Eraser shavings poured out.

I opened the carefully folded letter, and saw that it was written in Satsuki's familiar handwriting.

Dear Rekka Namidare,

I have something very important to tell you. I wanted to tell you in this letter, but I think it's better to tell you in person. I'll be waiting all day at the place where we always used to play.

—Satsuki Otomo

Her handwriting was always so neat. Nothing had been erased on the letter, but there were eraser shavings inside the envelope. Did that mean she'd rewritten it a few times? That wasn't like her.

"That's not a very helpful letter, is it? It doesn't say a word about what she actually wants to talk about." R had come up next to me at some point, and was peering at the letter.

"Well, we're going to meet up and talk about that now, right?"

"You're leaving now?"

"The letter said she'd be waiting all day. She can be weirdly stubborn sometimes. If I don't go, she might really wait all day."

"But you're tired from the entrance ceremony, right? Why not rest a little first?"

What got into her? She was suddenly trying to be nice to m— Oh.

"Did you really want to watch TV that badly?"

"I didn't say that."

"Sorry. We can do it some other time. I'll watch as much as you want on the weekends with you."

"It's fine. Really."

"Then don't sulk."

"I am not sulking." She looked pretty upset to me, though. Well, fine. I'd just have to stay up all night watching TV with her on Saturday. I left the house with R, thinking about what kind of DVDs we'd rent.

▽

The place where Satsuki and I always used to play was an abandoned factory at the top of a little hill, about fifteen minutes away by bike. I checked my watch when I arrived. It was 1:00 PM.

“I wonder what Satsuki wants, anyway?”

“It’s a little late to be wondering now, isn’t it? And didn’t you just say that’s what you were here to find out?”

“That’s true, but... I was just wondering what Satsuki would want to talk to me about so badly that she’d skip the entrance ceremony.”

“Hahh... Sheesh. You really are dense, aren’t you, Rekka?”

“What do you mean, dense?”

“I mean *dense*. Dull. Dumb. Whenever a girl gives a boy a letter and tells him to meet her at a certain place, it usually means only one thing. She wants to tell him that she loves him.”

“Huh?”

“Wow, the look on your face is so rude. My deduction was brilliant.”

“How was that brilliant? You dummy...” Me and Satsuki? No way. “She’s been my friend for over a decade now. She’s basically family.”

“I now understand the difficulty of my mission in my heart, and not just in my head.”

“Why? ...Well, whatever. Let’s go.” I locked my bike and went around to the rear entrance of the abandoned factory.

The place had been closed since I was a kid, but there was a single door in the back where the lock was broken. That’s how we always used to get inside. Just as I thought, the lock was still busted. I easily made it inside the factory where I used to play.

“It’s dark in here, isn’t it?”

“Does it seem dark to you too, R?”

“My senses are much the same as a human’s.”

“Huh. I thought your eyes would shine in the dark or something.”

“That would make it impossible for me to see anything, wouldn’t it?”

That’s true, come to think of it.

We waited for our eyes to adjust to the darkness before we went in any deeper. Satsuki and I always used to play in the big room in the back, so I had to walk down a dusty corridor for a bit. Maybe it was just because I hadn’t been here for a while, but the place seemed more run-down than it was when I was a kid.

My memories were fuzzy, but I managed to make it to my destination. This room had probably once been used to hold conveyor belts and big machinery, but now all that stuff had been removed. All that was left was an open space about the size of a gym.

Unlike the corridor I’d come down, there were windows here, and the sunlight from outside made it much brighter. It was still a little gloomy, but there was more than enough light to see her standing in the center of the room with her back turned toward me.

“Satsuki.”

She jerked a little when she heard me say her name, and then turned around. Her clothes were very ordinary-looking, and her straight, black hair was neither permed nor bleached lighter. She’d said before that she didn’t really like wearing makeup or putting a lot of effort into looking good, but I knew that she was secretly proud of her pretty black hair, and that she spent time caring for it every morning.

Satsuki had the same peaceful smile on her face that she always did. “Good morning, Rekka.”

“M-Morning... Wait, it’s afternoon now. Why’d you skip the entrance ceremony? Oh, and by the way, we’re in the same class again this year.”

“I see. That never changes, huh?”

“It feels to me like somebody’s setting it up. Anyway, how long have you been here?”

“Since this morning.”

“I knew it!” See? If I left her here, she would’ve waited the whole day. “Sorry. I forgot to check the mailbox this morning.”

“If you’d seen it this morning, would you have come straight here?”

“Of course.”

“I see. I’m glad.”

“Huh?” What was she talking about? Of course I’d come straight here. Why did she look so relieved? This whole thing felt kind of weird. “So what did you want to talk about?”

“Well... you may not believe this, but I’m actually...” Satsuki fell silent for a moment, and glanced around the room, as if she was hesitating.

I was starting to feel a little nervous. What did she want to talk about? This didn’t make sense.

R said nothing. Evidently, she wasn’t going to interrupt.

Just as Satsuki seemed to make some kind of decision, and opened her mouth to speak, the whole building shook.

All of us gasped in surprise as the glass in the windows shattered into thousands of tiny pieces.

The vibration stopped, and the factory was silent once more. A lot of dust had flown up into the air, but fortunately, the roof hadn’t collapsed or anything.

“That wasn’t an earthquake or anything, was it? ...Uwaah!” I realized that I’d grabbed Satsuki and was holding her head close to me to protect it. I must’ve done it without even thinking about it. “Satsuki, you okay?” I felt a little awkward, so I decided to say something to her.

She didn’t answer.

Crap. I took a look at her face, wondering if I should apologize for grabbing her. Even in the dark, I could tell that she was pale. Her teeth were chattering in fear.

“Hey, Satsuki? What’s wrong?” I tried to pat her shoulder, when...

“Don’t touch her, young man.” I was cut off by a bright, loud voice that sounded like someone reading from a script.

I turned around and saw a blond man with azure eyes, wearing expensive clothes and a cape that was the color of wine dipped in darkness.

He felt kind of evil.

And wait, where did this guy come from, anyway?

I moved Satsuki behind me and glared at him. “Who are you?”

“Who are you? I researched this country’s culture before I came to get her, so I know how this is done. When you ask someone’s name, you give your own name first, right?”

“Rekka Namidare. I’m Satsuki’s childhood friend.”

“I see.” The man nodded dramatically, like an actor.

“Now it’s your turn, isn’t it?”

“Oh dear. You seem to think I’m your enemy. I haven’t done anything to you, I don’t believe.”

“You’re scaring Satsuki.”

“I’ve given her no reason to fear me. I’m not going to hurt her. She’s my bride, after all.”

“Huh? What did you say?”

“My bride. She will marry me, Messiah Kyandistrapps, and grant me the wisdom of omniscience.”

I didn’t even understand half of what he was saying.

Just then, tiny fragments of something rained down on top of the man’s shoulders.

There was a hole in the ceiling? The concrete roof of the factory was ringed with cracks, and in their center was a hole big enough for a man to pass through. The hole was directly above Messiah, as if he'd made it himself and jumped down. But that's stupid. If somebody fell down from that height, they'd be lucky to even survive. And how could you make a hole in the ceiling without using any tools? But it still seemed like the only way to explain how the man had made it in here all of a sudden.

If nothing else, he ain't normal, I thought. But then what could he be? And then I remembered what I'd heard last night. The Namidare bloodline. The special blood in my veins, which both my dad and R had talked about. Assuming that had nothing to do with this was too much to hope for.

"Now, I've finished introducing myself. Will you move out of the way, young man?"

"I refuse."

"I see. Will you tell me why?"

"Don't make me repeat myself. You're scaring Satsuki. Why does she have to marry an asshole like you, anyway?"

"Does it matter to you if she becomes my bride?"

"Of course it does, idiot. She's my childhood friend. I know her so well, I know how many moles she has, and she knows the same about me. If you could make Satsuki happy, that would be one thing, but it doesn't look like that's the case. If you're trying to make her do something she doesn't want to do, then of course I'm going to protect her."

"Rekka..." I could hear Satsuki whisper my name softly behind her. Her teeth weren't chattering anymore.

"Young man, you seem to be standing in my way." Messiah pointed his index finger at me.

"Messiah!" Satsuki shouted suddenly, as if trying to stop him from doing something.

A shockwave struck my body from the side. I flew up into the air and slammed

into the filthy factory wall. “Gaah—” I hit my back hard, the impact forcing the air out of my lungs.

“Rekka!”

“Don’t move, Daughter of Omniscience.”

She tried to run over to me, but Messiah stopped her.

Daughter of Omniscience? The heck?

“Gah! I knew he wasn’t normal.” My back and left side throbbed with a dull pain, and a weird numbness ran through my whole body. My muscles still spasmed. None of this made sense. What the hell did he do?

“Oh my. Are you all right, Rekka?”

“R...” That’s right. R couldn’t get more than five meters away from me. When I got knocked away, she must’ve gotten dragged along with me.

“Hey, what did Messiah do to me?”

“Given my position, I’ve been programmed to be fair to each of the girls. If I side with any individual heroine, that will result in my having deliberately changed the future. So of course, I’m not going to help you resolve any of their story lines, either.”

“So that means this is one of those stories my dad told me about?”

“Oh my. Even after that, you’re still trying to gather information? You’re an idiot, but you’re tougher than I thought. It’s true that, given my mission, I’m capable of determining when you’re involved in a heroine’s story.”

“And you’ll tell me?”

“As long as having that knowledge wouldn’t influence the story’s outcome.”

It didn’t look like I could count on R for much help. At this rate, she probably wasn’t going to tell me about this “Daughter of Omniscience” thing.

What had happened just now, though? He hadn’t even laid a hand on me. It was like magic. Wait, was it *really* magic? This really is like a manga or a light novel, Dad. I’ve already run into a damned wizard. Magic? That’s cheating.

And it’s not normal at all. The “normal life” I loved was gone forever now. God

damn it.

“Oh, you can still stand?”

“Of course I’m going to stand up. Satsuki’s being attacked.” My whole body felt exhausted, but I forced myself up off the ground. “I don’t know what’s going on, but if Satsuki’s in danger, I don’t need a reason to save her.”

R sighed. I couldn’t tell if she was surprised or annoyed.

“Hey, hold on a second, asshole!” I grabbed a steel pipe as I stood up and flung it at Messiah as hard as I could. But just before it struck him, something knocked it away.

“Hmm. You’re a tough one, aren’t you?” Messiah turned toward me. He sounded like someone praising a baby for managing to stand on its own two feet.

“That’s my line.”

“I keep my whole body covered in a defensive shield at all times. Something like that won’t even scratch me.”

“That’s cheating...” I tried to make a joke, but to be honest, I was in pretty bad shape. And of course, he knew that, too.

“Rekka!” Satsuki called my name and tossed me something small enough to fit in the palm of my hand. I grabbed what turned out to be her phone.

“Take that and run! I’ll be fine!”

“Don’t be stupid!” Was I supposed to keep this as a memento of you? You’re terrible at sports. There’s no way you can fight this Messiah guy.

Messiah chuckled as he watched us. “You really are going to be a nuisance to me, aren’t you? I wasn’t planning on killing you, but I suppose it’s better to be safe than sorry.”

Messiah raised his hand above his head. Suddenly the air started to shake, and sparks appeared from nowhere. The sparks grew until they formed little lightning bolts that began to writhe around like snakes. The snakes began to entwine, until at last they formed a huge ball of light. A ball of lightning.

I wasn't sure what else to call it. In an instant, it swelled up, becoming so large that it could engulf a person's body easily.

"Don't worry. There'll be nothing left of you. Nobody will have to learn of your horrible death."

"Damn it! Thanks, but no thanks..." This was not good. Messiah was a real wizard. My instincts were telling me to run.

Was I scared? Of course I was. If that thing hit me, I'd be dead, no doubt about it. But how was I supposed to live with myself if I ran away and left Satsuki here? My legs were shaking, but I managed to stay where I was.

Sheesh! I don't how this Namidare bloodline stuff works, but this is one hell of an introduction.

And just as I made one last complaint to God...

"Eeyaaaah!" Something came down from the sky to make things even more complicated.

1-2: A Girl Comes Down From the Sky

That "something" fell down from above, and brought a ton of rubble with her. It seemed like she had stepped on the cracked, rotting ceiling above, then fallen through it. A fourth of the roof had caved in, falling directly on top of Messiah. At the same time, all the dust on the ground had flown up into the air, forming a smoky curtain that covered the whole room.

"Tch! What happened?" I could hear Messiah yelling from the other side of the curtain. Even all that rubble collapsing on top of him wasn't enough to kill him?

But this was the perfect chance to get away! I stuffed Satsuki's phone into my pocket and started to run. There was so much dust that I couldn't see anything, but I managed to run to where I last remembered her standing, and grab onto what felt like her.

"This way! Let's get out of here!"

"Huh?"

She started to say something, but I was in such a hurry that I headed for the factory's rear exit without waiting for her answer. I kept slamming into things, but we managed to make it out of the building, and I ran straight down the hill without looking behind me.

"I'll protect you, no matter what!" I yelled, panting. Maybe I was just trying to distract myself from my own terror. It was the only way I could keep running.

I remembered my bike halfway down the hill, but there was no going back for it now, so I kept running. I had no idea how long I'd been running. I kept shouting things to encourage her as we fled. It was the one thing I could do to make her feel better.

By the time I'd finally hit my limit, we were far enough away that I couldn't see the hill with the factory on it anymore.

"Hahh... hahh..." My mouth felt like it was full of sand. I wanted water, and bad. It didn't look like Messiah was following us, so we must have made it away safely. And then "Satsuki," who'd been very quiet so far, asked...

"H-Hey... What's your name?" It was a voice I didn't recognize.

"Huh?" I turned around in surprise, and saw I was holding a hand that belonged to a girl I'd never seen before.

"Your name. N-A-M-E. Tell me already."

"R-Rekka... Namidare." I was so astonished that I couldn't do anything but answer her question.

"Rekka Namidare... Rekka, huh?" For some reason, she repeated my name to herself happily.

Hold it. How did this happen? I looked toward R, who had been dragged along with me, for help.

"You grabbed the wrong girl while you were in the dust cloud." Seriously? But where did this girl come from? Oh, that's it. She must've been what fell through the roof. Come to think of it, I remembered hearing her scream before she fell.

"Hey, are you listening to me?"

"Huh? No, um... what's up?"

“Jeez! I’m being nice enough to give you my name, so listen to me!” The girl was pouting angrily, shaking the long, silver twin tails that went down to her feet.

Then she put her hands up to her chest, covered by a strange, lacy dress, and puffed it out proudly. “My name is Iris Fineritas Cyphercall. I am the only daughter of the chairman of the Owaria, the highest ruling body of the planet Finerita. Normally a lowly native from a primitive planet like this would never get the chance to touch me, so you should feel honored!”

“Huh? Oh, sorry!” I suddenly realized that I was still holding her hand, and quickly let go.

“Dummy. I said you should feel honored, didn’t I? This time was special, so I’ll let you get away with it.” But Iris quickly grabbed my hand again and smiled at me.

She was holding my hand so tight now that I didn’t think I could let go. Actually, it hurt. But at the same time, it was soft. It felt strange.

“Wh-Why is this time special?”

“Because you saved me when I was being chased, obviously.”

“Huh?” What was she talking about?

“From what she’s saying, maybe she was being chased, too? And then she fell through the roof of that factory while she was running. Then you grabbed her hand and ran away with her, and so now she thinks you saved her?” My head was starting to hurt, so R helpfully offered her own theory.

“L-Listen, I...”

“And you said you’d protect me, no matter what! I never thought I’d actually hear a boy say something like that!” Iris put the hand that wasn’t holding mine up to her cheek and wriggled back and forth. Evidently, R’s guess was right.

“Hah... hahahah...” She was mistaken about quite a few things, actually, but it didn’t feel like a good time to correct her.

If I’d left Satsuki in the factory, I needed to go back and get her. I tried to tell Iris I was in a hurry, but she wasn’t listening.

“Yes, that settles it! Rekka— you can be my lover!”

“Huh?!” Isn’t that skipping a bunch of steps?!

“If I show Daddy I’ve got a lover, he’s sure to give up on that stupid marriage thing. Now, off we go!” She took a strange item out of the bag slung over her shoulder. It looked like a makeup compact. When she opened it up, I could see several buttons in a row. She pressed one of them with a slender finger.

Everything around us suddenly got darker as a huge flying object appeared above.

“A U... U...”

“Looks like a UFO, doesn’t it?” I was too shocked to move, but R’s voice was calm.

Iris pushed the button again, and this time a mysterious beam of light came down from the UFO— and began to suck us upward.

Was this going to be like cattle mutilation?! Wait, I just realized this when we started to float up, but Iris has a tail coming out of her butt! Was she really an alien?

“W-Wait! What about what I want?!”

“You’re going to to protect me no matter what, right? So be my lover, okay?”

“That’s a big misunderstanding!” My scream was swallowed up by the light from the UFO, and so was I.

▽

“Mm...”

“Oh, you’re awake?”

Did I pass out? I was in some room I didn’t recognize. The ceiling and floor gleamed a dull silver. There were two windows on the walls and something that looked like a control panel. It seemed like I’d been sleeping on the floor.

“Sheesh, you scared me. Humans sure can’t handle their gravitational changes. Oh, and you were filthy, so I cleaned you and your clothes up while you were asleep.” Iris was grinning, and her face was strangely close to me. Wait, if I was

sleeping on the floor, why did it feel like the back of my head was touching something soft?

“U-Uwah!”

“What? Does the idea of sleeping on my lap bother you that much?”

S-Sleeping on her lap?! I never thought I’d experience that! I felt my face turning red, but I couldn’t help but look at Iris’s thighs. So my head was lying on those bare thighs... Wait a second.

When I looked down, I could see her tail bouncing back and forth happily. Its hair was smooth like a horse’s tail, and it was silver, just like the pretty hair on her head. It was cute, I thought, but it was also unshakable evidence that she wasn’t human.

“Wait, where am I?!” I asked, a little belatedly.

“Inside a spaceship.”

“Not that! Where’s the ship?” I pressed my face up against the window to look outside.

On the other side of the window, I could see blurry, warped space that shone with rainbow colors.

“Is this... space?”

“It’s warp space. We’re heading to planet Finerita. It should take about three hours or so, I think?”

“Three hours?! I don’t have three hours! Send me back to Earth, right now!” Satsuki was in danger. I needed to hurry back and save her.

But the answer that came back wasn’t the one I wanted.

“I can’t. Warp space is a one-way street. Once you’re inside, you can’t get out until you reach your destination. If you want to get back, you have to wait until you arrive and then warp again.”

“N-No way...” I staggered and fell to my knees.

“What’s gotten into you? What’s wrong?”

I wanted to scream at her, but it didn’t feel like I had the strength. If only I

hadn’t mistaken Iris for Satsuki... But regrets wouldn’t help me now. I’d just have to pray for her safety while I waited for the warp to end, and then ask Iris to take me back.

But it would take at least six hours to get back no matter how fast I hurried. I felt like I was going to pass out.

Iris got mad again when she saw how I looked. “Come on, get a hold of yourself! I can’t introduce you to Daddy looking like that.”

“Huh? Daddy? Introduce me?”

“That’s right. I’m going to say that you’re my lover, and introduce you to my dad.”

“Why?”

“To make my dad give up on marrying me to King Satamonia!”

“Why?” Iris got even madder.

“I didn’t say a word about wanting to get married! That disgusting Satamonian just keeps trying to court me. And Daddy’s trying to hand me off because he doesn’t want to make him mad. He’s trying to marry me off to help him politically! No, he’s basically trying to sacrifice me!”

“Sure, that sounds bad, but is this King Satamonia guy really that scary when he gets angry?”

“He is, yeah. The Greater Galactic Federation... Wait, you wouldn’t know what that is. It’s basically like a space government. And it’s run by representatives from 72 planets, chosen by each galaxy. And my home planet, planet Finerita, has one of those 72 seats, but since it’s political, there’s all these factions and hierarchies.”

“King Satamonia’s planet is high up in those hierarchies, then?”

“Yup. He’s the leader of a bunch of stupid, violent fascists. And there’s all kinds of dark rumors about him, too. They say his armies are pillaging some of the border planets and things. Just hearing it makes me sick.”

If that was true, King Satamonia was a really bad guy.

“Anyway, I just don’t want to marry him!”

“Uwah!” Why was she grabbing on to me?!

“So... you can be my lover, and then that’ll solve the problem!” Her high-pitched voice tickled my ears. I could feel two soft, round things pressing against my back. They felt like pudding! It made it impossible to think.

“No, why would I...”

“Because you’re going to save me, right? And you were kind of cool when you grabbed my hand and pulled me out of there. And it’s an honor to be my lover, even if it’s just pretend.”

“Okay, okay! Just let me go!”

“Huh? Why?” Iris tilted her head to the side in confusion. She seemed to not be doing it deliberately.

Please! Stop pressing those soft things into me! Please! Huh? What? I have to pretend to be her lover to stop her from getting married? But I have to get back and save Satsuki from Messiah, and... wait, her... her... they’re... Gah! I can’t think! I need to get her off of me so I can take a minute to think.

“Sorry, but do you have anything to drink? I’m really thirsty.”

“Oh, come to think of it, you really have been doing a lot of running. Wait. I’ll bring you something now.” Iris got off me, and went through one of those fancy sci-fi sliding doors into the next room to get me something to drink.

“All right, R.”

“What is it?” R, who had been staying quiet this whole time, raised her hand and answered me.

“Let me ask you a question.”

“Sure. As long as it’s not something that will help you resolve one of the stories.”

“Then let me ask you straight. Whose story am I involved in right now?”

“Iris’s, I believe.”

“Then what happened to Satsuki? Is she safe?”

“I can’t answer that question. But if your question is whether you’re still involved in Satsuki’s story, too, the answer is yes.”

Damn it. I figured she’d say that.

“So I’m caught up in both Satsuki’s and Iris’s stories at the same time?”

“You’re so popular! All these different stories want a piece of you.”

“Don’t act like it’s a good thing!” How was I supposed to save my childhood friend and a space princess at the same time?

“Well, for my part, I’m just relieved to see that you’re capable of blushing and acting embarrassed around the heroines.”

Grr... I just realized that R had seen everything that happened when I’d been sleeping on her lap and when she’d been pushing up against me.

“Anyway, Rekka, don’t you think you panicked a little too much back there?”

“Any guy would react that way!” I tried desperately to defend myself, but R just grinned.

“Sheesh... What’s your take on Iris, R?”

“I’m not into yuri.”

“That’s not what I meant!”

“I was joking. My take on Iris? Hmm... I think she’s a very frank person who says what she likes and what she doesn’t like. You could call her selfish or childish, if you liked. But she has a very natural way about her.”

Hmm... her opinion was about the same as mine. “She’s a kid, in both a good and bad way.”

“But she doesn’t have the body of a child.”

“Shut up!”

“But you decided to help her after you felt her breasts, didn’t you?”

“No!” The instant I yelled back at her, the door slid open and Iris came back.

“No what?”

“No, nothing!” Iris couldn’t see R, so I was able to talk my way out of it.

“Here, have some juice.” She offered me an orange liquid that tasted like a sports drink. The taste filled my mouth and slaked my thirst instantly.

“This tastes really good.”

“Does it? I’m glad.” Iris smiled.

Honestly, it was a beautiful sight to see.

“Huh? What’s wrong?”

“No, nothing!”

“You said that a moment ago.”

Gah... I’d never had any girls in my life except my mom and Satsuki. The encounter rate was going up way too fast! I didn’t know how to handle this!

As I gulped down the juice to hide my red face, Iris pushed herself up against me. Her breasts pressed up against my back again, and I almost spit out my drink.

“Hey, are you busy?”

“Huh? N-No, but um... get away from me...” I tried to subtly move away, but I couldn’t shake off the hand she put on my shoulder. Were Fineritans stronger than humans?

“I’ll show you around the ship, then. Your planet— Earth, was it? It doesn’t have this kind of technology yet, right? I’m sure you’ll enjoy it.”

“Fine. Fine, just get off me...”

Iris moved away a second later, but I ended up letting her show me around the ship.

The only place that wasn’t really decorated was the control room I’d been in. All the other rooms had pink or soft white walls, and her private room was filled with the kind of fancy furniture and decorations that girls love. Her taste didn’t seem to be that different from an average Earthling’s.

The last room she showed me into was a tiny one at the ship’s stern.

“What is this place?”

“Hmm... it’s kind of like a storeroom, I guess.”

Iris said “open” and the door slid open with a whoosh sound. I went inside and saw that it was filled with all kinds of different things. I couldn’t imagine what most of them were for, but several of them piqued my interest.

“What’s this?”

“A warp watch. It’s a small teleportation device.”

“Huh, cool.” Just as the name “warp watch” implied, it was shaped like a small wristwatch.

“Want to put it on?”

“Can I?” She gave me permission, and I tried it on. You wore it just like a regular wristwatch. Hmm? Couldn’t I use this to get back to Earth?

“Hey, how do you use this thing?”

“It’s simple. You push the button on the side to boot it up, and then input the coordinates of the place you want to warp and activate it.”

“Coordinates?”

“The spatial coordinate axis, based off the place you’re currently standing.”

I’m terrible at math, though.

“Oh, and since it’s a small device, it can only move you a few hundred kilometers. And it can only move one or two people, and maybe the things they’re holding.”

So even if I could use it, I couldn’t get back to Earth, then. I sighed a little when I thought she wasn’t looking, and then I picked up something that looked like a gun.

“What’s this?”

“A laser gun.”

I thought so. I’d seen guns like this in science fiction movies. It was kind of cool-looking.

I was feeling a sense of awe as I looked at the gun, but I could see Iris pouting

next to me. Did I do something wrong?

“Um... you look kind of upset. Is something wrong?”

“I don’t like that thing. It’s from Satamonia. But it’s really strong, and sometimes undeveloped planets can be dangerous...”

“Oh, I see.” She must really hate this King Satamonia guy.

I would feel really bad if she had to marry a guy like that. But... compared to the danger that Satsuki was in right this very minute, it didn’t seem like a very pressing problem. If I couldn’t deal with Messiah somehow, I probably wasn’t going to have time to help Iris.

Satsuki’s phone was in my pocket. I didn’t want this to be the last thing I had to remember her by. Just as I was about to tell her I needed to go back and save my childhood friend, the room suddenly filled with green flames.

“Uwah?!”

“Huh? What’s going on?! Rekka!” Iris backed away in surprise as she cried my name.

“Wh-What is this?” I thought it was fire... but it wasn’t hot? The strange flames, if that’s what they were, got stronger. Soon they were covering me and R, too.

“R!”

“Oh dear. What a sticky predicament, huh?”

Don’t act so calm! Freak out a little, like I am!

Then the green flames’ color became white.

A flood of light filled the room, and took me away to a world of pure white.

“Rekka!”

The last thing I heard was Iris’s voice. And as I felt a strange, floating sensation, I crossed some kind of boundary.

1-3: Summoned to Another World

I’d been keeping my eyes shut, but suddenly I could tell that the light had vanished, and the strange sense of floating was gone. Did this mean that whatever happened was now over? I fearfully opened my eyes, only to be shocked. I’d lost count of how many times that had happened to me today already.

I’d gone from a futuristic spaceship to a big, medieval-looking room made of stone. There were elaborate decorations everywhere, and a thick carpet lay on the floor. But the carpet cut off where I was, and instead there was a strange, intricate design on the floor.

There were a bunch of middle-aged and old men in medieval clothes, staring at

me from a distance. What was going on here?

“Who’s that?”

“I’ve never seen clothes like his.”

“Did it succeed?”

“Impossible!”

“But what else could it be? It worked!”

“But he just looks like an ordinary boy to me.”

“A hero’s a hero, no matter how old he is.”

“But is he really a hero?”

“A hero...”

“A hero...”

What were they whispering about? I heard a word that I was normally only used to hearing in video games.

“Our hero!” And then there was a loud shout, and a girl jumped into my arms. She looked to be thirteen or fourteen. She wore a robe that covered her whole body, and her smokey blond hair was pressing into my chest.

The girl in my arms looked up at me. I was shocked at what I saw.

There were huge tears in her eyes.

“Huh? Wh-Why are you crying?”

“Hero! What is your name?” The girl cut me off. Her voice was full of energy. She seemed to be crying tears of joy, not sadness. That was a relief, at least.

“My name’s Rekka Namidare, but... where am I?” I answered the girl’s question and asked one of my own.

“Rekka Namidare... So the hero’s name is Sir Rekka, then!”

“I’m... the hero?” The hero? Why was I a hero? And where was I?! But while I was panicked, reality was mercilessly settling in.

“Your Highness! The hero says his name is Rekka Namidare!”

“Huh? ‘Your Highness’?”

I followed the girl’s gaze, and... there he was. The most regal-looking man I’d ever seen, sitting on a huge, luxurious throne. He was fat and wore a crown. That’s exactly how kings were supposed to look!

“I see! Then the royal family’s legend was true?” The king was impressed for some reason, but I was having a hard time trying to keep up.

I had a bad feeling, though.

“Hero from another world! Please, defeat the Demon Overlord that threatens our kingdom of Aburaamu and save us!”

And there’s the line I was expecting. Thanks. Now I knew exactly what was going on.

“I see. So this time, you’ve been caught up in the story of a hero and a demon overlord, huh?”

Seemed like it. I was already busy with wizards and aliens, and now I’d been sent to another world. Give me a break.

“Well, good luck.” I was on the verge of a breakdown, but R was floating in space with her knees crossed, relaxing. My suffering probably meant nothing to her.

But I couldn’t afford to be unconcerned. There were over a hundred people around me, and they looked so excited that it was a little scary. They were getting closer and closer. If I wasn’t careful, they might all leap on top of me like the girl had done. One of them in particular was a middle-aged man with rippling muscles. I definitely didn’t want him jumping on me.

“Harissa. What’s wrong with the hero?” The king must have wondered why I wasn’t saying anything, because he looked suspicious when he asked the girl.

The girl— Harissa, her name was— still had her face buried in my chest. She looked up at me. Her eyes were a pretty blue.

“Hero. Tell me something.”

“Something? Is anything okay?”

“Yes!”

“All right... Please let me rest for a little while. Please.”

Chapter 2: I’m a Level 1 Villager. Can I Beat the Demon Overlord?

I wasn’t sure whether they granted my request or not, but the king and his men gave me a guest room with a big canopy. I flopped onto the bed and finally got to catch my breath.

“Hero! Is there anything else you need?” Harissa was filled with energy, the exact opposite of how I was feeling.

“No, I’m fine. Can you just make sure I’m alone for a little while?”

“Of course!” Harissa gave a cheerful answer and went to pass my message on to the servant girls outside.

As I watched her go, I sighed to myself like an old man and said, “Wow, she’s got a lot of energy.”

“Do you like girls who are a little simple, like her?”

“No comment.”

I ignored R’s question and tried to think back on everything that was going on. It wasn’t good. A wizard, an alien, and a girl from another world. Just dealing with one of them would be bad enough. How was I supposed to handle all three? If you included R, the “girl from the future,” there were actually four of them. But the War of All was taking place in the future, and wasn’t important right now. That was the one thing I had going for me, maybe.

“Man... what the hell am I supposed to do now?”

“You’re in a whole other world now, too. You have to solve this problem first.”

“I don’t have the time. Even if I refuse to get involved in another world’s problems, Satsuki’s in danger even as we speak. I have to get back to my own world, and fast.”

The hands on my wristwatch had kept ticking even after I was brought here, so

I knew it was about 2:00 PM on Earth. I'd arrived at the abandoned factory around 1:00 PM, which meant that about an hour had passed since Messiah had appeared.

Messiah had said he wanted to marry Satsuki, so he probably wouldn't hurt her, but... I still needed to get back as fast as possible.

But for some reason, R was looking at me confusedly.

"If you're going home to your world, does that mean you're leaving this world to its fate?"

"What do you want me to do about it? I just have the bloodline. I don't have any powers, and I'm not special. I can't save anything."

"Are you sure?" she asked again.

"Are you telling me I should do something?"

"No. But if you give up on this story..."

Before she could finish her sentence, Harissa came back from the hallway and the conversation came to an abrupt end.

"Hero? Were you talking to someone just now?"

"No. Sure you weren't imagining it?"

"I must have been hearing things, then! I do that a lot! I once mistook my grandpa's snores for a dragon's roar, and the whole village ended up in an uproar because of it!"

Was that something you should say so cheerfully?

Harissa trotted over and sat down right next to me. Sh-She was really close...

"Hero! Do you need something from me?"

"Not really."

"You must, though! The king told me to take care of you. Tell me what you want me to do. Anything!"

"Think you can sit a little further away, then?"

"I... I'm sorry? I was so excited, I got close to you. I stink, don't I?" Harissa

went beet red and jumped away from me.

“No, I didn’t mean that you smelled bad or anything...”

“No, I do! I’m a peasant, and I’m really not supposed to be here at all. So I know there’s peasant all over me! It’s coming from under my armpits, because I’m getting nervous just talking to you!”

This world probably didn’t have antiperspirant, did it?

Anyway, it looked like this girl— Harissa— was the one who’d brought me to this world. Which meant that if I wanted to get back, she was the person I should go to for help.

“Hey, so can I ask you something?”

“Of course! What is it, Hero?” It was hard to say this when she looked at me with those shining eyes, but... I didn’t have a choice.

“Please send me back to my own world.”

“Huh?”

Yeah, that’s about what I thought would happen.

“I can’t defeat the Demon Overlord. I’m not a hero.”

That’s right. I was just a normal guy. In an RPG, I’d be no different than a random villager.

“But... But! You were summoned by the secret ritual of the Aburaamian royal family! The legends say that a true hero will appear in a flash of bright light...”

“Sorry, I just have a tendency to get caught up in things like that. If you need a hero, ask someone else.”

“That... That can’t be true.”

“It is true.”

“No... It’s not true! You’re... You’re a hero. You have to be a hero. Otherwise, I’m in big trouble.”

To be honest, it hurt to say this stuff.

But I had things I had to protect. “That’s your problem, not mine. I don’t have

time for this. Please, send me home!”

“Hwaah!” I got a little excited and yelled, and Harissa fell out of the bed. Her bright sunny smile vanished, and tears formed in her eyes.

“Ealim Nekram!” Harissa used her quivering lips to speak some kind of incantation. Suddenly, she disappeared.

“Huh? Harissa?”

I couldn’t see her, but I could hear her running. Then the door to the room seemed to open on its own, and the footsteps continued out into the hallway.

“Did she use magic to turn invisible?”

“Dunno.” R was sticking her head out of the floor while the rest of her body was sunk beneath it. It looked like someone had chopped it off and put it there.

I decided to ask her, though I wasn’t expecting much.

“Do you know how to get back to my old world?”

“I can’t answer that.”

“Figures...”

“I asked this before, but are you really certain about going home to your world?”

“And I answered this before. I plan to get back home as soon as I can.” What was going on here? R was really persistent about this. “Does something happen if I go home?”

“Of course. If you leave, this world is doomed,” R said.

“Doomed?”

“You’d understand this if you thought about it for even a second,” she continued, crawling out of the floor as she spoke. “A story without a hero is doomed. There have actually been whole countries that were doomed because your ancestors gave up on them. For a story, the Namidare clan is its last hope.” Her eyes were clear and honest beneath her military cap, without a trace of a lie in them.

“Dad didn’t tell me that.”

“Because he’s your father. If you learned that a story you abandoned was doomed, you might do something reckless. As you yourself just said, after all, you’re just a normal person.” My dad had told me not to give up on them if I could.

Maybe he really wanted to tell me to save them, no matter what. He’d given me a hypothetical. Maybe he hadn’t given me a real example because he was my dad, like R said.

But what difference did that make? I had the laser gun and warp watch that I’d brought from the spaceship, and I had Satsuki’s cell phone in my pocket. The owners of those objects had asked me to save them and their stories as well.

There were three girls, three stories, and only one hero: me.

Was it possible for me to save them all?

“So, Rekka, what are you going to do?” R said.

“You’re acting like this isn’t your problem... It’s thanks to you that I’m not sure.”

“For my part, I need you to finish these stories and hook up with a heroine, or my mission is never getting done.”

“Did you maybe realize that my dad didn’t want me knowing all that stuff, and then tell me anyway just because it made things easier for you?”

“Oh, of course.”

“Why, you little...”

“Umimimimi...”

I grabbed R by the cheek and yanked it as hard as I could, even though none of this was really her fault.

Either way, I had to get this resolved. I couldn’t sit here forever.

I decided to get up from the bed and wander around for a while. It would be dangerous to leave the laser gun here, so I stuck it in my belt.

“Where are you going?”

“On a walk.”

“What are you going to do about going home?”

“Decide later. I’ll think about it while I’m walking.”

“I see.” I started to wander the castle. R came with me. The hallways were made of row after row of stone bricks. It felt like I’d become a character in an RPG.

“I can feel everybody staring at me.”

“Yup.” I was wearing a normal high school uniform, but since nobody else wore clothes like that here, I really stood out. People were staring at me, and I couldn’t concentrate.

“Maybe it would be better to just stay put in my room?”

“No, stimulating the soles of the feet activates the brain’s cells. When you’re not sure what to do, you can always go for a walk.”

“I didn’t know that. You’re pretty smart, R.”

“I sure am. And you’re just ignorant, Rekka.” Either be proud of yourself, or insult me, but please stick to one.

“Oh? Do I smell something good?”

“Hmm? You’re right.” R started to float through, and I followed after her.

We came to the room where the good smell was coming from.

“Looks like this is the kitchen.”

“Wait, R, do you get hungry?”

“No. But I do have a sense of smell, and it certainly smells delicious.”

“I see. I’m seriously hungry, though.” Come to think of it, I hadn’t had anything all day except for the toast I’d eaten this morning.

I opened the door, hoping that they’d give me something to eat.

“Um, excuse me...”

“Huh? Oh, wow! If it isn’t the hero!” A middle-aged woman welcomed me excitedly. She was probably the cook. “I’m so glad you’re here, Hero! The country’s finally gonna be at peace!”

I’m not a hero, though... But maybe it would be worth it to hear what she had to say before I decided if I was going home.

“I just got here, and I don’t know anything about what’s going on. Can you tell me about this place?”

“What, the king and Harissa didn’t tell you? My stars, that’s no good. We’re asking you to help us! Sure, if you want, I’ll tell ya everything ya need to know.”

“Okay, first tell me about the Demon Overlord.”

After that, she told me about the Demon Overlord and his armies.

She told me that after being sealed for several hundred years, the Demon Overlord had revived two years ago.

He could use summoning magic to make his armies appear anywhere on the continent, and once they were done pillaging and plundering, he could just bring them back to his castle again. Since there was no way to attack his armies, the humans were being slowly crushed.

This meant, however, that if the Demon Overlord was defeated, his armies would be gone for good. But his castle was on an isolated island and surrounded by a powerful barrier. There was no way for anyone to get in.

“We’ve tried a buncha times to get an army through the barrier, but we just kinda stand there outside since we can’t break it. Then he summons his armies, and he whups us.”

“If the barrier’s that strong, then there’s nothing I can do, right?”

“Nah, there ain’t nothing to worry about there!”

“Why?”

“Under the castle is the Hero’s Sword, which only the hero can draw,” she said excitedly. “They say the Hero’s Sword has the power to cut through any kind of magic. You’ll chop that barrier right in half!”

Well, that explained that, then. That was why everybody in this country was holding out for a hero.

The woman breathed a huge sigh of relief. “Thank goodness! Now the

country's saved, and so is Harissa!"

"Huh?" What did she mean by "so is Harissa"?

Just as I was about to ask what she meant, a man poked his head into the kitchen and yelled for someone to help him bring in some ingredients.

"Whoops! They're a-callin' me!" The woman bowed to me apologetically.

"Sorry, but I gotta go. If there's anything else you wanna know, ask Harissa. She's in the study."

"The study?"

"It's at the top of the west tower."

"Thanks. I'll check it out later."

It would be kind of awkward to see her after I'd just yelled at her, but no matter what I did, I needed to talk to her again. I was curious what the woman had meant, too.

"Thank you. Anyway, I don't want to interrupt you..."

"Oh, wait a second." As I turned to leave, now it was her turn to stop me.

"About Harissa..."

"Huh?"

"I'm from the same village as she is, and I know her really well. She's a really fragile girl. She's honestly got no business being a military sorcerer. But things are so bad these days they practically forced her to work for them."

This was the first I'd heard of Harissa working for the army. It was true that it didn't seem to suit her.

"Please, Hero. Be good to her." That was all she said before she ran out of the room.

"I guess I'll go see Harissa." R and I headed for the top of the west tower, where we were told Harissa would be.

"How many steps do these stairs have?" I complained, out of breath.

"Two hundred and fifty six."

“I shouldn’t have asked.”

“I’m floating, so it doesn’t bother me at all.”

I tried to smack her down to the ground, but she slipped away.

After a few more minutes of banter, we made it to the top tower.

“Do you hear something from inside?” I asked.

“It sounds like crying.”

“I wonder if it’s Harissa...”

“It probably is.”

I was feeling pretty bad. I opened the door silently, so she couldn’t hear me.

The room was filled with bookshelves lined with scrolls and books, and there were piles of paper on the floor. If there was ever an earthquake, anybody here would be buried alive. The mountains of books meant there were a lot of places I couldn’t see, and I couldn’t tell where she was standing from the entrance.

I followed the voice and saw a girl in a robe, curled up in the corner with her hands around her knees.

“Harissa?”

“Huh?! H-Hero! E-E-E-Ealim Nekr...”

“Wait! Don’t run away.”

I grabbed her hand before she could turn invisible and escape again. She tried to shake it off.

“D-Don’t! If you touch m’hand, you’ll get filthy!”

Her accent sounded similar to the lady in the kitchen now. Didn’t she say they were from the same village? Maybe this was how she usually talked.

“Of course I won’t! Calm down!”

“No! When you touch me, my hands get all sweaty!” Her hand did feel a little slick, but that didn’t matter now.

I kept holding on to Harissa no matter how much she struggled, and her face got redder and redder.

“Pu-pu-pu-pu-shuuuu!” Eventually she overheated, and collapsed to the ground.

“Rekka, you should use that forceful nature of yours in another capacity.” R was complaining for some reason, but I ignored her.

“Now, then...” Once Harissa was staying put, I asked her about what I’d heard from the kitchen lady.

“So that’s what I heard. What did she mean about you being saved, too?”

“...I was supposed to be executed.”

For an instant, I gasped. “Wh-Why?”

“I’m a sorcerer, I guess, and I’m supposed to be good at summoning magic, but...” Slowly, she started to tell me the story. “My magic summons spirits from the spirit world. But spirits are really hard to deal with, and it’s up to the sorcerer to make them obey you. If you fail, the spirit can get mad and go on a rampage, or cause a lot of mischief, before they go back home.”

“You wouldn’t want to mess up then, huh?”

“Yes. But I really screwed up.”

“When?”

“When I participated in the Seventh Anti-Demon Overlord Expeditionary Force.”

“Geh!” That was a hell of a time to screw up.

“I tried to fight the demons that the Overlord had summoned, but... I couldn’t control the magic...” As she spoke, her voice began to mix with sobs.

“I wrecked our camp, and we had to retreat. I was supposed to be executed for what I did! But I’m the last summoner the kingdom has left... so they said if I could summon a hero with the royal family’s ritual, the king would give me a special pardon.”

“I see...” That’s why she said she needed me to be a hero.

“But it doesn’t matter anymore.” Suddenly, she smiled like a girl who was already dead. It looked like she’d just given up on everything, I guess.

I'd never seen anyone smile like that before in my entire life. There was a pricking pain on the left side of my chest.

I'd lived a normal life in a normal way, and so it was impossible for me to understand what she was going through. But I could tell from her smile that she was facing an incomprehensible despair. Was that the kind of smile I was supposed to see on a girl who was younger than me? Or did everyone in this world smile like this, because of the Demon Overlord? Is that why nobody tried to save Harissa? Because in this world, despair was normal?

"I'm slow, and I cry, and I can't work in the fields, and I'm the most useless girl in the village. When the army's test showed I could be a sorcerer, I was happy, but in the end, that didn't work out either." Harissa buried her face in her robe-wrapped knees. It was like there was no one in the world who could fix that gloomy smile of hers. "I just bring misery and disaster to everybody. I deserve to be miserable. I'm better off dead." She smiled as she spoke.

Instead of reaching out for help, she smiled like she didn't care how it was going to end. No. That wasn't right. You can't just accept death that easily.

Harissa had reached out for help. She'd reached out to a hero from another world, and I'd knocked her hand away.

She didn't want to die. She was a normal girl who wanted to live... Who wanted someone to save her. That's why I...

"Like hell you are." This time, I reached out and grabbed the hand I'd knocked away.

Harissa looked up. She looked straight up at me, tears streaming down her face.

"Don't you ever say that you deserve to be miserable."

"Hero?"

"That's the same as saying it's normal for you to be miserable, and I refuse to accept that."

I liked normality. I loved it. That's what made you happiest.

But what Harissa said was the exact opposite. She said it was normal for her to

be miserable. And that... I just couldn't take it.

"Aaah... God damn it! Fine!"

I roughly scratched my head. Harissa was looking up at me in astonishment.

"Sorry, Satsuki. I'll be back as soon as I can, I promise. So just hang in there." I apologized to Satsuki back on Earth.

I knew I didn't have time for this... but what could I really do? I was the only one who could save this story, or this poor little girl. So... the normal thing to do was save her, right?

"I'll defeat the Demon Overlord for you."

▽

Harissa said that the hero's first job was to pull out the Hero's Sword and then gather companions at the tavern. But I didn't have time.

"B-B-B-B-But you're going to defeat the Demon Overlord, right?"

"Doesn't matter. I've got a wizard and a space king lined up after this." I didn't have time to go through the tutorial.

"It's 2:30, huh?" I'd been here for half an hour. Iris had said her warp would take three hours, so I wanted to get back by then if I could.

So the biggest problem was the time it was going to take to get there.

"Um, hero. You've been staring at that thing for a while. What is it?"

"This? It's called a watch. It tells me the time."

"Wow. That's really convenient. So is that a watch, too?" Harissa pointed to the warp watch on my other wrist.

"This is something different. It's called a warp watch."

"A warp watch? What does it do?"

"You can calculate coordinates for a place, and input them into this, and it'll teleport you to that place." I couldn't do coordinate calculations though, so it was useless to me. Though if I could use it, I could teleport right past the barrier and into the Demon Overlord's castle.

As I sighed in frustration, Harissa slowly raised her hand.

“I can do coordinate calculations.”

“Seriously?!”

“Y-Yes. You need to be able to do coordinate calculation to be a summoner, so you can specify where you’re going to do the summon.”

“Yes! All right, can you put them into this, then? What I need is the coordinates for the Demon Overlord’s castle, relative to where we are now.” I told her what I needed and gave her the warp watch.

“Um, there should be a map of the continent somewhere in this room. I’ll look for it.” Harissa charged into the mountain of papers and books.

“Now we can get there. Next up is the weapon.”

The first thing I thought of was the Hero’s Sword. “It’s supposed to be able to cut through magic. Can I use it to defeat the Demon Overlord?”

“I guess my first question would be if you ever learned how to use a sword,” R said.

“Oh...” That’s right. I was just a normal guy. Even if I did have a weapon, it wouldn’t do me any good if I couldn’t use it. I’d never held a sword in my life, so even if I did have the Hero’s Sword, it wouldn’t be of any use to me.

A normal hero would probably start by building up experience points fighting slimes and learning to use his weapon, but I didn’t have the time.

“Well, that’s a problem...”

And then Harissa ran back to me, in the exact same way that she’d run off. “Hero! I finished putting in the coordinates!”

“Really? That was fast.”

“I worked really hard. Now we should be able to jump right to the center of the Overlord’s castle— hwah?!” Before she could finish her sentence, Harissa stepped on some of the papers on the floor and slipped.

I quickly reached out and grabbed her to keep her from falling.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m jes’ fine!” For some reason, Harissa was shaking as she moved away from me. Her face was bright red... Had she hit her nose on my chest?

“Rekka, how were they?” R peered right into my face. I glared back at her to see what she meant. “Her breasts. Her bust. Her boobs, if you prefer. You copped a feel just now, didn’t you?”

“I did not!” My voice was loud enough to startle Harissa.

“H-Hero?!”

“Oh, sorry. It’s nothing.”

Damn it! R got to say whatever she wanted because nobody but me could see her. I cursed at her, silently this time, and went to pick up the warp watch that Harissa had dropped. And then— “Coordinate entry confirmed.” An electronic voice came from the warp watch. “Ten seconds to warp. Nine. Eight. Seven...”

“W-Wait—!”

Wait a second! Had this thing turned on? Did the impact from hitting the ground flip the switch? Iris hadn’t told me how to cancel the thing. The countdown continued as I panicked, until there wasn’t any time left to look at it at all.

“Whatever! We’ll just go right now!” If I didn’t grab it, the warp watch would go to the Demon Overlord’s castle all on its own. And if that happened, there was no way I was getting back home today.

I told myself that I didn’t have a choice, and then wrapped the warp watch around my wrist.

Harissa grabbed my hand. “I... I’ll go, too!”

“You idiot! Let go—” I tried to shake her off, but I couldn’t do it in time. The countdown read “zero.”

“Initiating warp.”

▽

In the next moment, I found myself in a very cold place.

“H-Huh...?!” My head was spinning. Was it an aftereffect of the warp? I took a

look around.

The floor felt cold, so it was probably made of the same stone as the king's castle, but it was cold in a very strange way. The only light was from the torches on the walls, and the room was too big for them to show any more than their immediate surroundings. There were no windows, so there was no sunlight, and the air was freezing. Who built this place? It's defective! Someone call the architect!

"Ow... where are we?" I could hear Harissa's robes rustling next to me as she spoke. She'd ended up coming with me.

"Harissa! Why did you follow me?"

"B-B-Because I couldn't let you go alone!"

"Why? That's why you summoned me, right?"

"At first, yes... but when you told me that my problems weren't your problems, I started thinking." My eyes were starting to adjust to the darkness, and I got the sense that Harissa was looking down at the floor.

"What you said was right. This world isn't your world. Our problems aren't your problems. But instead of solving our problems ourselves, we tried to turn to you for help. The king, the generals, everyone, even me... we were all really selfish." Harissa held her staff tight to her chest.

"But then you said you'd fight for us anyway. For this world, which isn't your own. I'm embarrassed that I was only thinking of myself. So let me fight with you, please." I could feel Harissa's resolve, and it was painful.

"Don't get the wrong idea." I needed to correct one thing, though. "I'm fighting the Demon Overlord for you."

"F-F-For me?!"

"Of course." It would be rude to say that I just took pity on her, so... I didn't.

"For me..."

"Huh? What's wrong, Harissa? Is your face red?" Her cheeks were blushing so much that I could see them even in the darkness.

“N-N-No! I-It’s n-nothing!”

“Well, if it’s nothing, then fine...” My ears were stinging after she’d yelled right next to them... but that didn’t matter.

“So yeah, I don’t want you to be put in danger. I’ll fight the Demon Overlord myself.”

“B-B-But...!”

“I don’t care what you say. I’ll give you the warp watch. Use it to go back to the castle right—”

“No! I’mma fight wit’ you, too!”

This was going nowhere. She’d started to throw a tantrum, and dropped back into her country accent.

As I tried to figure how best to persuade her...

“You there...” I suddenly heard a third voice. It was a low, baritone voice that shook the whole room. It was coming from the back of the room, where the darkness seemed deepest. “Why are you shouting in my bedroom?”

My eyes had finished adjusting to the darkness, and I could see the speaker clearly. The first thing I saw was a huge bed that looked like it could sleep fifty people. I could see a tail the size of a log draping down the side. My eyes followed the tail up to a huge body, framed by wings the size of a ship’s sails. It had four thick, tough-looking limbs. Sharp claws. Hard scales. Fangs. Red eyes, shining in the darkness. A face like a terrible carnivorous lizard, with a crest on top. I’d played enough games to know what this creature was.

“A... A dragon?!”

“Th-The Demon Overlord?!” Harissa and I screamed at the same time.

The scaly, green dragon Demon Overlord narrowed its eyes at us, seemingly annoyed.

“What’s going on? I’ve never seen rotten corpses with such clean bodies.”

“R-Rotten c-c-c-corpses are a kind of m-m-m-monster!”

Thanks for the explanation, Harissa, but that wasn’t what I wanted to know

right now. I wanted to know what was going on.

Per usual, I looked to R for an explanation. How many times had I done that today? “Harissa input the coordinates for the center of the island, right? If the Demon Overlord’s castle is at the center of the island, then do you suppose you teleported right into his bedroom?”

Gah! How could I be so precise? No, how could I have such crappy luck?

“Excellent work. You hit the jackpot. Way to go, Rekka.”

“Shut up!” But yelling at R wasn’t going to make this situation any better at all.

I stood between Harissa and the Demon Overlord, and turned to face him. What’s my plan? I don’t have a plan! The Demon Overlord scratched his jaw with fingers thicker than my torso as he looked at us in confusion.

“That girl just called you a hero. But the barrier isn’t broken...”

“Th-That’s right! I’m not a hero!” I nodded frantically as I tried to talk to the Demon Overlord.

“But if you’re not a hero, then who are you?”

“I... I don’t know?”

“I don’t like wasting time with stupid questions.”

“I... I’m just lost!”

“I said, I don’t like wasting time.” Every time the Demon Overlord opened his mouth, the room shook and the stone floor quaked. That was how overwhelming he was. There was no way I could take him in a fight.

I was panicking, and I was having a hard time thinking of things to say. I couldn't come up with a good lie to get myself out of this! At this rate, it was going to be game over before I could do anything.

This is no good. Calm down, Rekka! Find some way out of this! I patted myself down, looking for some way out of this.

And then my fingers caught on something on my belt. This was...

"A-All right... I'll tell you the truth." I summoned up all my courage and steeled myself for what I had to do.

"Oh? And what is that?" I drew the laser gun from my belt and immediately fired it.

"DIE!"

"What?! GWAAAAAH!" The Demon Overlord must've been caught off guard, because my crappy surprise attack hit him dead-on.

"Wh-Wh-What the hell?" Wait, that laser beam was huge! This isn't a laser gun, it's a laser cannon! A torrent of destructive light poured out toward the Demon Overlord and swallowed the upper half of his body.

And when the light was gone... I saw a hole in the wall leading all the way outside the castle, and the black ash that was all that was left of the Demon Overlord's upper body.

W-Well, that was cheating, kind of, but if the Demon Overlord's dead, that's all that matters, right?

I wasn't fully satisfied, but Harissa was looking at me excitedly, with stars in her eyes.

"W-W-Wow! I thought the art of light magic was lost centuries ago! You really are the hero of legend, Sir Rekka!"

"Um, well... Maybe..." That wasn't magic, but I guess I don't need to tell her that.

Anyway, if the Demon Overlord was dead, it was time to go home. There was still a lot I had to do.

“Hahahah... Splendid, hero!” And then, I heard another baritone voice echoing through the room.

“Th-The Demon Overlord?!”

“Humanity created light magic to defeat me. I’m surprised that anyone still knows how to use it.” I could hear the Demon Overlord’s voice clearly. Which meant I wasn’t imagining it. The Demon Overlord was still alive.

“But my power is far greater than this!” The lower half of the Demon Overlord’s body began to ripple and tremble. The ash on top of it blew away, and a new upper body formed. Now he had four eyes, with tiny little pupils giving off an evil light. His arms split into two at the elbow, and now there were twice as many forearms and huge claws. His newly grown scales had changed from green to gold. The old scales on the bottom half of his body fell away, and it became the same color as the top.

“Hey... Harissa... what’s that?”

“I... I... I don’t know! The records didn’t say anything about this!” Harissa fell flat on the ground again

“Did you think I did nothing during the centuries I was sealed away?” The golden dragon chuckled throatily. I could see sharp fangs when it opened its mouth.

“Your attacks cannot touch my second form.”

“What?! Seriously?!” If that was true, I was screwed. I was lucky even to win the first time.

The Demon Overlord gave a sadistic smile as he saw our shock.

“There were two things in the last battle I fought that defeated me. One was light magic. The other was the Hero’s Sword, which nullifies my magic. But after long, long years of research, I succeeded in replicating the power of the Hero’s Sword for my own use.”

“B-But that means...” Harissa shouted in despair.

“That means... what?!” I didn’t know what was going on, but I screamed, too.

The Demon Overlord grinned cruelly, its fangs peaking from its mouth.

“That means that the light magic you just used can’t affect my second form.”

“B-But then...” Harissa’s voice was shaking, and it sounded like she was about to start sobbing.

If magic wouldn’t work on him, that meant that a sorcerer like Harissa— no, she and probably everyone else in the world— had lost their one way to fight the Demon Overlord.

But instead of despair, I just felt mildly curious.

“Now despair, puny humans! Kneel before the manifestation of your destruc —”

“Take this!” I pulled the trigger on the laser gun before the Demon Overlord could finish his sentence.

“GYAAAAAAAAAAAH!” There was another scream, just like the one before, as the Demon Overlord turned to ash. The room became silent once more.

“Thought so.” I nodded, sure of my theory now.

“Huh?!” A moment later, Harissa screamed. She was as surprised as I’d ever seen anyone in my life.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-What’s goin’ on? How’d yer magic work on th’ Demon Overlord?”

“S-Stop shaking me. That was...” Just as I tried to explain, the Demon Overlord revived again.

This time, his lower half turned into something like a centaur, and his arms and legs had split into four. He was more than twice as tall as his last form, and his head brushed against the ceiling of the bedroom.

“What did you do?! Magic’s not supposed to work on me!”

“It’s simple. My gun isn’t magic. It’s science.” Alien science, to be precise.

“S-Science?!”

“Just die already!”

“GWAGGGHHHHH!” I was getting sick of talking to the Demon Overlord, anyway. Demon overlords usually rambled a lot.

But then he revived again. “Listen to m— GYAAAAAHH!”

“Are you really the her— UGWAAAHH!”

“Would you just— GWWWAAAHHHH!”

Give it up already. Damn.

“How many more forms do you have?”

“Do not think you can defeat me! With every transformation, my power grows! And I still have two more to go!”

“So I pull the trigger two more times then. Got it.”

“Wai— GOOWAAAHAHH!”

And so the Demon Overlord collapsed to the ground, burnt to a blackened crisp. He wasn’t lying about powering up. By the time I’d finished off his last form, instead of turning into ash, he’d turned into barbecued dragon meat. It smelled pretty good, actually.

There was a moment of awkwardness. Sure, if you grew up hearing tales of a legendary hero, seeing the Demon Overlord defeated like this was probably enough to crush your dreams. But at least I beat the guy, right? Right?

I’d learned something from this, too. If I’d only been caught up in Harissa’s story, I probably would’ve taken the Hero’s Sword and went on a journey to defeat the Demon Overlord. I would’ve gone to the tavern to recruit allies, and raised my sword and magic skills fighting random monsters before finally battling the Demon Overlord. But if I’d done that, I would’ve had a horrible time trying to handle the Demon Overlord’s second form, since magic wouldn’t work on it.

Instead, though, I’d been caught up in three stories at once. And that meant there was no need to care about the rules of any one particular story. That might help when I was dealing with Satsuki and Iris’s stories. I made sure to remember it.

“So... yeah, no point in hanging out here forever. Let’s go back to the castle.”

“R-Right...” Harissa nodded, but she seemed somehow unsatisfied by the fact that the strange power of science had so easily defeated Demon Overlord.

▽

We warped back to the castle study.

“Okay, send me back to my world.”

“Already?!”

“Yeah.”

I’d said it a lot already, but I didn’t have time to waste. To get back to my old world, I needed the person who summoned me here, in other words, Harissa, to do another ritual to send me back. It was pretty simple.

“All right, go ahead and do it.”

“You’re really leaving already?”

Yeah, that’s what I’ve been saying.

Why didn’t Harissa want me to go back? The hero she’d summoned, or at least, the person who was supposed to be a hero, had defeated the Demon Overlord. All she had to do now was tell the king and receive her pardon. She didn’t need me here for that.

“Stare...” R was staring at me so hard she literally said the word “stare.”

Wh-What had gotten into her?

For now, I decided to try and persuade Harissa. “Why don’t you want me to go home?”

“Well, um... I haven’t told the king yet, and... if we defeated the Demon Overlord, I’m sure there’s going to be a celebration. S-So you need to be there.”

“No, I kind of cheated when I beat the guy. I don’t need a celebration. And I want to get back as soon as I can.”

“Is there someone waiting for you in your home world, hero?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah...” I was pretty sure that Iris and Satsuki were both waiting for my help.

“I see...” Huh? Why did Harissa look so sad?

“Jesus...” R was rolling around in mid-air. She looked just like my dad did when

he was trying to open a stuck lid.

“I understand. I’ll send you back to your home world.”

“Great, thanks.”

“But first, please take this.” Harissa handed me a loop carefully woven from red thread.

“A red bracelet?”

“This is a magic item called the Red Thread. Do this, and...” Harissa took out a thread from the bracelet and wove it around her pinky finger. “The Red Thread has the power to connect people. If you put it on your body and make a strong wish, you can always come back to Aburaamu.”

“Hmm...” So it was a one-way ticket to this world, huh?

“Why are you giving me this?”

“In the end, I wasn’t any help in defeating the Demon Overlord. But if you ever find yourself in trouble back in your own world, I want to help you.”

“You helped a lot, Harissa. So don’t worry about it.”

“What are you talking about?!” Harissa shouted. It was probably the first time I’d seen her mad. “You don’t know how grateful I am to you! If it weren’t for you, I would’ve been executed. You fought the Demon Overlord when I was too pathetic to do it. You’ve done so much for me that I could never repay you.”

I nodded, feeling a little overwhelmed.

She must’ve been crying from yelling too much, because she wiped her eyes. “If you’re ever in trouble, use the Red Thread. I promise I’ll help you.”

“Got it. Thanks.” After all that, I couldn’t just give it back to her. So I took the bracelet and thanked her.

Harissa drew the complicated magic circle needed to send me home on the floor of the study. I didn’t know what the pattern in the center meant, but it was just big enough for one person to stand in.

“It’s a lot smaller than the last one, huh?”

“Summoning someone is hard, but sending them back is easy.”

“Hmm... then the most important part of being a summoner is the summoning part, then.” I decided to say something to her that I’d been thinking for a while. “Hey, Harissa, are you sure you’re not actually a really strong sorcerer?”

“H-Huh? N-No way! I’m a failure...”

“But if the ritual you used to summon me was a secret of the royal family, it had to be really complicated, right?”

“Well, yeah...”

“See? You’re probably really good at summoning spirits or whatever. Making a spirit obey you once you’ve summoned it is mostly a matter of being tough and intimidating, right? I mean, I don’t know anything about it specifically, but... I think what you lack is self-confidence.”

“Self-confidence?”

“Yeah. You were the only sorcerer in the party that defeated the Demon Overlord, after all. From now on, be more confident, and stop thinking of yourself as a failure.” Hmm... Why did I decide to lecture her like this? I wondered, but I actually knew the answer.

The real reason I’d decided to beat the Demon Overlord was that I wanted her to be able to fight. I wanted her to have the courage to believe that she could be happy, and to fight, instead of just giving up on everything and thinking that she deserved to be miserable. If she couldn’t do that, she could never live a normal life.

I wanted her to find happiness, instead of giving up. Was that just me being a show-off? Well, it probably didn’t matter. It wasn’t like I was going to see her again. It wouldn’t matter if I embarrassed myself a little before I said goodbye.

The sending circle filled with light— and just before I went back I thought I heard her whisper, “I hope I can see you again someday, my hero.”

Chapter 3: I’m Just a Human. Can I Stop an Interstellar War?

When the light disappeared, Iris’s face was right in front of me.

“Mmm... UWAHH!”

“Eeyah!”

Our faces were so close to each other that we both screamed and jumped back at the same time.

Wh-Whew... Just a little more and our faces would’ve touched. I won’t say where.

Either way, if Iris was here, that meant I was back to my own world. I took a moment to sigh in relief, and then in the next instant Iris jumped on me and pushed me down. I moaned in pain.

“Rekka, where have you been? I was really worried!” If I told her I went to another world, she probably wouldn’t believe me.

“Sorry, some stuff was going on.”

“What do you mean, ‘some stuff was going on’?! I just cleaned your clothes, and now you’re all messy again! The warp’s almost over, so we need to get ready to meet my dad!”

“The warp’s almost over?” I checked my wristwatch. It was a little before 4:00 PM. I’d been away from Earth for almost three hours.

“Looks like you made it back by the time you wanted,” R said, as she adjusted her military cap.

She was as expressionless as ever, but I could tell she was a little ticked off. It felt like she’d been that way since a little before I came back to this world?

Anyway, just like she said, I’d made it back at the perfect time. I needed to persuade Iris to send me back to Earth as soon as the warp was finished.

But Iris grabbed my hand before I could bring it up. “Come on, quick. Let’s get changed in my room.”

“No, wait!”

Her arms were far stronger than you’d think from their tiny size, and I was dragged helplessly throughout the ship.

“The first thing you need is a bath. Come on, get in.”

“No, listen to me. I need to tell you something important first—”

I wanted to tell her about Satsuki as soon as possible, but before I could, she locked me inside the bathroom. It was a weird-looking bathroom, too. There was no tub and no shower.

“Okay, I’m going to wash you.”

“Huh? But I’m still dressed...”

I could hear her fiddling with some controls outside the bathroom. Then the ceiling opened up a little and a flood of white gas came pouring out.

“Hey, wait— NYGAAH!”

Suddenly, a strong centrifugal force spun me around in the center of the room and covered me with the gas. I spun for a few dozen seconds, until I wasn’t sure which way was up or down anymore, and then finally released.

“Okay, we’re done. You’re all clean now,” Iris said, as she came inside.

I felt like I was about to throw up. “Now I know what it feels like to be a shirt in a washing machine.”

The white gas must’ve been some kind of cleaning agent, because all the dirt and grime that had accumulated on me and my clothes in the other world was gone now. That shower had worked, even if it wasn’t very pleasant.

“Next, we need to choose your clothes. I’ll get you a nice outfit that really tells everyone you’re my lover.”

“No, wait!” I was dragged down another hallway. This time she took me to her room.

There was a round bed with pink sheets, a big chest of drawers, and a makeup

stand. One wall was piled high with stuffed animals that didn't look like they were from Earth. Where in the universe could you find a creature that looked like a cross between an octopus and a giraffe? Wherever it was, I hoped I never ran into it. There were a lot of other things, too, but there was room for all of it. The place might have been bigger than my living room.

"Now, then, what would be a good outfit for you?" Iris started to hum as she grabbed clothing out of her dresser.

A dress, a dress, and then another dress. What was she planning on having me wear? "I-Iris... Listen to me."

"Hmm? What is it?" Iris stopped going through her clothes and looked at me.

Ugh... it was hard to talk about it when she was staring at me that way, but I didn't have a choice. Satsuki was in danger right now, and Iris's problems could wait a little. Dealing with Satsuki was more urgent.

I steeled myself and began to speak. "Once this warp is over... I'm sorry, but can you turn us around and go straight back to Earth?"

"What?! Why?" Iris was angry, just like I thought she'd be.

"You see..." I told her that my childhood friend, Satsuki, was being chased by a wizard named Messiah back on Earth. I figured that telling her about the Namidare bloodline, or the mix-up at the abandoned factory, would just make things complicated, so I didn't mention any of that.

I explained things as carefully as I could, and I think I got across the point that Satsuki was in more immediate danger than she was. I thought that Iris would agree and send me back to Earth, but...

"No," she refused.

"Wh-Why?!" I asked.

But the space princess just turned away from me in a huff. "Because you're choosing this Satsuki girl over me, right? So no."

"No, I'm not choosing anyone. I just have to save her."

"I want you to save me, too. Why won't you meet my dad?!"

Um... so what was going on here? Did Iris think I was just going to save Satsuki, and not save her?

“I’ll pretend to be your lover, too. But Satsuki’s in more danger right now, so I want to save her first.”

“That means you care more about your Earth girl than about me!”

No, it doesn’t!

Iris shook off my hand and jumped onto the bed, then hid herself beneath the covers.

“I hate you, Rekka!” She screamed from under the sheets. I started pacing. I had no idea what to do.

Why was this happening? I told her that Messiah was after Satsuki, right? I could pretend to be her lover anytime, so obviously Satsuki needed saving first!

As I tried to figure out what I did wrong, R swam by in mid-air, staring at me with cold eyes. “You really don’t understand how women think, do you, Rekka?”

There was nothing I could say.

Iris seemed to be seriously pissed off. She was buried under the sheets and refusing to come out.

“The ship will now exit warp. There will be slight turbulence. Please be careful,” said an electronic voice from the ceiling.

This was bad. I wanted to head right back after the warp, but I couldn’t imagine Iris helping me like this. I needed to get her back in a good mood somehow.

“Um... I’m sorry. Don’t get mad. Come out.”

SMACK! Her tail, the one part of her that was sticking out of the sheets, slammed into the bed.

Dang. Maybe that was a bad way to put it.

“Exiting warp.” The electronic voice informed us that our time in warp was about to come to an end.

There were no windows in Iris’s private room, so I didn’t get to see what it

looked like when we exited warp. Instead, I felt a heavy impact in my stomach.

“C-Come on. Help me out here. I want to get back to Earth as soon as I can.” I pulled on the sheet that Iris was covering herself with.

“No! NO!” She grabbed onto the sheet and wouldn’t let go. For a moment, I felt like a mother trying to get a kid out of bed in the morning. Since she was stronger than I was, I collapsed first, though.

I didn’t have time to screw around anymore. I needed to get back and save Satsuki as soon as I could.

I stood up off the ground again and started to shake her. “Come on! Seriously! Please! I’ll get down on my knees and dogeza if I have to!”

“What’s a dogeza?”

“It’s a man’s ultimate weapon!” At least, that’s what my mom had told me. Come to think of it, why was she the one who’d taught me that, instead of my dad?

Iris poked her head out of the sheets a little and looked at me cautiously. From the look on her face, there still wasn’t much room for negotiating.

“I promise!” There was no time to worry about appearances now. I activated my ultimate weapon. I dropped down to my knees in a sudden, exaggerated movement, and smacked my head against the floor.

Iris must have found this bizarre, because her body twitched in shock.

“I promise I’ll save you after I save Satsuki! So please, just let me save her first! Messiah might be doing something terrible to her right now! So please! I’m begging you!” And then I stopped. Now it was just a question of whether my feelings would reach Iris.

She was silent for a while. I could feel her looking down on me from the bed. I remained stock-still.

And in the end... she gave in first. Iris sat up, the sheets still over her head, and stared right at me. “Are you in love with this Satsuki girl?”

“Huh? No, she’s just my childhood friend. It’s nothing like that.” I wasn’t expecting that question, so it took me a second, but I answered honestly.

“Hahh...” For some reason, R sighed above my head.

And then...

“Fine. You can go back to Earth.”

“Really?!” I leaped off the ground and looked at her face.

She was still a little angry, but her expression was much softer than it had been a moment ago.

“Really. But!” Iris leaned off the bed, and moved her face close enough to touch my nose. “This Satsuki girl is really just your childhood friend, right? You’re telling the truth, right?”

“Y-Yeah!” I didn’t know why that was so important to her, but since it was true, I nodded.

Either way, while Iris didn’t seem happy about it, she agreed to return us to Earth. Suddenly, however, an unexpected shockwave struck the ship, and the floor began to shake.

“Eeyah!”

“Uwah!”

There was no warning at all, so Iris lost her balance and fell on top of me.

“Ow...” I managed to grab her and keep her from hitting the ground, but I hit the back of my head on the floor, and my vision wavered a little. “Wait, why would a ship shake in space?”

There weren’t waves like there would be in an ocean, right? I grabbed Iris to try and help her up... and felt something very soft in the palm of my hand.

Um... I’ve got a really bad feeling about this. Iris was on top of me, looking shocked. To be honest, I didn’t want to look away from her eyes. More specifically, I didn’t want to look down.

But Iris was slowly, fearfully looking down at her chest, and slowly, fearfully, I had no choice but to follow her eyes. God, please let this wonderful feeling in my palm just be an illusion.

“Eeyah! Rekka touched my boobs!”

My hopes, however, were quickly dashed. “W-W-Wait! It was an accident! This was an accident!”

Iris jumped off of me and wrapped the sheets around her body, as if trying to protect herself. Her face was beet red.

Wait, she’s allowed to grab me, but I’m not allowed to touch her? Talk about selfish. Wait, now’s not the time for that! First, I need to tell her I’m not a pervert... wait, now’s not the time for that, either! First, I need to find out why the ship shook.

“Iri— bwah!” Just as I opened my mouth, a stuffed animal that looked like a cross between a rabbit and a penguin smacked me on the jaw.

“No! Stay away!”

“Okay! Okay, just stop throwing things at me!” Even if they were made of cloth, they still hurt when a super-strong alien threw them!

I managed to finally calm Iris down. After that, we headed for the ship’s control room. And there we saw...

“A... A whole space fleet?!”

I looked out the window and saw dozens of what appeared to be spaceships. Several of them were clinging to Iris’s ship, trapping us.

“Iris. Are these the Satamonian guys you were talking about?”

“No. These belong to the Fineritan Self-Defense Fleet.”

“Huh?” Finerita was Iris’s home planet, right? Why would they be trying to capture her?

“We finally caught you, Iris.” I heard a low, male voice emit from the speaker on the control deck.

Iris’s eyes went wide. “Daddy!”

“Daddy?!” Wait, all these ships were out here to catch a runaway daughter?

“Daddy, why are you doing this? Why are you arresting me like a criminal?”

“You don’t understand anything, do you? Perhaps I sheltered you too much.”

There was a note of disgust in his voice that confused me. Was this how a dad usually acted toward his daughter? “Hey, you.”

“Hmm? It seems there’s someone else aboard... Well, that’s fine. You can ask your questions later. For now, I’m having the Self-Defense Fleet take you back to Finerita. And then, you’re coming before the Owaria.” That was all he said before he hung up.

I was even more confused now, but with all these spaceships surrounding us, there was nowhere to run. We had no choice but to obey.

▽

Seen from space, Finerita was a green planet. When we landed on the surface,

I could see grassy plains stretching out all the way to the horizon. If Earth was a planet of water, this was a planet of fields, maybe.

Iris's spaceship was locked in place by the Self-Defense Fleet's anchors and brought here. We were taken to the center of a huge tower that stretched all the way up to the clouds. In the middle of the tower was an open "mouth." The fleet's ships formed a line and went inside. This was probably the headquarters of the Owaria, the committee that ruled planet Finerita.

The first thing they did when we landed was take away my warp watch and laser gun. I tried using the warp watch to escape before they grabbed us, but it seemed like there was some kind of warp-blocking technology at work in the tower. I guess without some kind of blocker, the warp technology would be too dangerous to just let anyone have.

We were brought to some kind of elevator that looked like a dais. I was scared that I might fall off the edge as the dais rose up, but Iris explained that there was an invisible force field surrounding it.

Iris didn't say much while the self-defense force people were surrounding us. Her lips were pressed into a thin line, and she looked down.

Well, I guess that's what you'd expect after the way her dad treated her. What was her dad, who was supposedly the head of the Owaria, thinking?

We were taken like prisoners to a room with a round table at the top of the tower, where the Owaria met. The room was brightly-lit, with lights embedded into the ceiling. Part of the wall was glass, so you could look out and see the clouds.

Sitting at the round table were old men wearing clothes with upturned collars. They were probably the members of Owaria, and they all looked very strict. Talk about a bad welcome.

Sitting right across from us on the other side of the round table was a grim-looking, middle-aged man with short-cropped, silver hair and a wrinkled brow. His jaw rested on his folded hands, and he was glaring at Iris with a sharp gaze. I whispered a question into Iris's ear, asking who he was.

"That's... my dad. He's the head of the Owaria."

“Why’s he so mad?”

“I don’t... know. It’s probably because I ran away from home... but I’ve never seen him so upset before.”

Hmph.

I glanced over at R. This time, however, she only shrugged. “Even I can’t make any guesses without more information.”

That’s true. For now, I needed information. Otherwise, there was no way they’d let me go, and no way I could get back to Earth.

“U-Um...”

“I don’t know who you are, but please remain silent.”

I hadn’t even said anything yet! But I was an outsider here. I’d just have to let Iris talk to her dad instead.

“Iris.” I motioned for her to ask her father what was going on.

“Oh, yeah...” Iris was probably having trouble watching her dad stare at her silently like that, too. She was fidgeting like she didn’t want to talk, but she finally looked up.

“Um... Dad?”

“What?” Even talking to his daughter, his voice was still firm.

“Hwahh! Um...” Iris’s lips trembled when she heard his voice, and she looked back down at the ground.

“D-Did I do something bad?” Her voice was barely above a whisper, but the whole round table froze when they heard her.

Come on! That’s not a good question! I almost yelled at her, but managed to stop myself.

It was clear from the atmosphere of the room that they were all mad. Asking if she’d done something wrong, as if she had no clue, was just pouring oil on a fire. Just like I expected, some of the men were smashing their fists into the table.

“‘Did I do something bad,’ you ask?”

“You don’t even know what you’ve done?!”

“Chairman, even if she is your daughter, don’t you think you’ve spoiled her a little too much?”

There was a storm of curses and harsh words that made me want to cover my ears. The other Owaria members, in particular, seemed to be the ones who were getting the most excited. Iris’s father was just pressing his lips together and waiting for everyone to calm down.

“What’s going on here?” Iris sobbed, already in tears.

I tried to figure out what was going on, but half of what I heard was just filthy curses, and I couldn’t get anywhere.

“I see. So that’s it.” R, however, seemed to have figured something out.

Before I could ask her what it was, Iris’s father rang a silver bell that was placed on the table. A high-pitched sound that threatened to pierce my eardrums and stab right into my brain stem rang through the room, and instantly there was silence. It must have been some kind of tool to calm down debates when they got too heated.

“Our planet is now faced with greater danger than any other since we first attained spaceflight.” His voice was low and clear as he began to speak to us. No, he was talking to Iris. “Planet Finerita has already mined all its natural resources. We survive by importing resources from other planets, processing them, and then exporting them. You know that much at least, right?”

Iris nodded a little, silently.

“This means, however, that we have little ability to survive on our own. If some form of pressure were to cut off all our imports, we would have no choice but to starve.” His words stopped.

Everyone in the room was looking at Iris.

At this point, even I knew what was going on. Planet Finerita was about to meet the fate that the chairman had just described. And the reason was...

“Iris, this is because you refused to marry King Satamonia.”

Yeah, that was about what I thought.

Iris shook her head, as if she really didn't know what was going on. "But... but..." She didn't say anything else. She just kept shaking her head.

"W-Wait a second!" I moved between the men and Iris. Everyone started looking at me.

"Who are you?"

I gulped in fear before I answered his question. "My name's Rekka Namidare. Why I'm here is a long story, but there's something wrong with you people."

"This is none of your concern, child!" One of the Owaria members yelled at me, but the chairman raised his hand to stop them.

"Rekka Namidare, I brought you here to find out what, exactly, my daughter has been doing, but that can wait for a moment. I'll ask you to remain silent until it is time for you to speak."

Iris's dad was talking like one of the teachers at school. I wasn't good at dealing with that sort of person. But, well... I couldn't just stand here silently.

"You guys keep talking like this is all Iris's fault. It was King Satamonia who asked her to marry him when she didn't want to, right? So she should have the right to refuse, shouldn't she?"

"Unfortunately, no."

"Why?"

"Because Iris is my daughter." There was no emotion at all in his voice. "I am, for better or for worse, planet Finerita's representative to the galaxy. Thus, I must always consider this planet's interests, and its peace, my highest priority. That goes for my daughter as well."

"That's your problem, not hers."

"So you're willing to let an entire planet starve, just to help her?"

"Uh! N-No, that's not what I said..."

"King Satamonia is a persistent and forceful man. If the marriage is delayed any further, he may invade our planet this time. There're plenty of ways to fabricate a cause for war, if he wants one."

Would anyone normally go that far, just for one girl? No, the problem was that King Satamonia wasn't normal. He might start an interstellar war if he had to. That's why everyone looked so grim.

The chairman glanced back at Iris. "Iris. You've lived a very easy life. And not only that, I've let you get away with most every selfish thing you wanted to do. All of that was because you're the daughter of the chairman. Don't you think that it's time to repay the planet for all the benefits it's given you?"

Iris was looking down at the floor the whole time as she listened. Her face was pale. She must have had no idea that her actions had brought all this on.

Mmm... What should I do? I couldn't think of any counter-arguments, either. I was starting to think that they were right.

The whole room fell silent. Iris and I stood there helplessly. And then suddenly, all the lights in the room went out.

"What happened?!" One of the Owaria members screamed.

It was too dark to see anything. I could hear a confused babble surrounding me. The one thing I could make out was the sharp, low voice of the chairman, telling one of the guards to find out what had happened.

I had no idea what was going on, and there was nothing I could do. All I could do was just stand there... but then, I suddenly felt a tug at the hem of my shirt.

"Iris?" From the direction it was pulling me, I could tell that it was her. I could sense from her hand that she was shaking. Just before I spoke, the room lit back up.

But this time, it wasn't the lights from the ceiling. The glass window had turned into something like a computer monitor, and the light was pouring out from it.

"Gwah fwah fwah fwah! My beloved Iris! You're as cute as ever!" There was a nasty, nasty laugh. On the screen I saw a man that looked like a combination of a human, a pug, and a toad, with a bald head and antennae. His obese body was purple, and each time he laughed, his belly fat shook. Standing next to him was a thin man who was also purple.

“So who’s that?” R asked. Her voice was as disinterested as ever.

The chairman couldn’t have heard her, but he spoke to the man on the monitor with a bitter look on his face. “King Satamonia. I don’t remember opening a communications channel.”

So this fatass was King Satamonia, huh? The king laughed again when he heard the chairman’s words.

“Gwah fwah! Don’t be such a stuffed shirt. I was just so happy to hear my beloved Iris was back that I couldn’t help myself. Just ask my chief of staff here.” The thin man must have been his chief of staff. The slimy grin on his face was pissing me off.

“Indeed. When you heard the report, you hurried straight to your communications staff, sire. You were in such a hurry that you stepped on one of your pets and crushed them.”

“Hmm? Did I? I don’t remember.”

“I’ll buy another of the same type for you later.”

“Hmm... No, next time I want a Dumbrage gorilla from planet Janbarila.”

Were they getting off-topic? The king and his chief of staff started talking about the next pet they were going to buy, seemingly oblivious to the fact that they’d interrupted our conversation. Of course, no one on the planet Finerita side was participating.

“Your Highness, what can I do for you?”

“What else? I’m here to talk about my marriage to little Iris.” Iris’s face tensed up when she heard that.

King Satamonia was oblivious to her change of expression. If he’d been looking closer, he could’ve seen how much she hated the idea of marrying him. But if she refused, something terrible would happen to this planet.

Everyone in the room was looking at Iris. They were all silently telling her to say yes.

I was starting to panic, but in the end, I couldn’t say anything. I just stared at Iris’s face. If she refused the marriage, there’d be an interstellar war.

A war... What was I supposed to do about that? All I had to do with the Demon Overlord was, well, kill the Demon Overlord. But a war was different. It wasn't a problem I could solve on my own. One wrong move and millions would die. That was how war worked.

It wasn't something I could handle by myself. I couldn't think of any way to resolve this. Should she do her duty, like the chairman said? *Maybe she doesn't have a choice,* I thought to myself.

I could tell Iris was about to give up and nod. She was biting her lip and still looking down. She was going to give up on her own wants, smother her own feelings, and do what everyone wanted to her to do.

There was a single tear running down her cheek that she couldn't quite hide—

"Hold it right there!" I screamed.

Everyone turned to look at me.

"Rekka?" Iris looked up at me with tears in her eyes.

"Hmm? Who the hell are you?"

"Shut up, pig-frog!"

"GWAP?!"

I told the guy on the monitor to shut up, then took a breath to calm down. I'd been so overwhelmed by what was going on that I'd forgotten what was important. Even now, Iris's "story" was heading straight for a bad end.

And all I'd been doing was watching her cry, and telling myself that there was nothing I could do, or that I couldn't think of anything. What an idiot. If everything was going to work out without me doing anything, I wouldn't have had all this trouble today. The only way these stories were going to have happy endings was if I did something. I wasn't sure if what I was doing was right, but I'd try my best anyway. I had to stop this tragedy from happening!

"Are you guys all really okay with this?"

Everyone looked at me as if they didn't understand what I meant. Nobody answered me.

The chairman's eyes, especially, were sharp and narrow. I asked him again. "What about you, chairman? Are you really okay with Iris marrying this guy?"

"Young man, please, be silent. This is our planet's problem to solve. Not yours."

"I'm asking you if you're okay with it."

"My personal feelings aren't important. Protecting this planet and its people is my duty."

"Shut up and answer the question! I'm asking you, her dad, if you're okay with marrying her off to someone she doesn't want to marry! If you really think that's going to make everyone happy!"

Iris's father's expression twisted. He glared at me and bit his lip, showing anger for the first time. The stream of blood running down his lip told me exactly what he really thought. "Then what do you want me to do?"

"All you had to do was look that way from the start. Right, Iris?"

"Daddy..." Iris's eyes were still red and puffy, but the tension was gone from her face.

There was nothing harder, or more painful, than making an enemy out of your own father. She must've felt a lot better knowing her dad didn't really want her to marry King Satamonia. The two of them would probably be fine now. All that was left was...

"What are you people talking about? Are you trying to interfere with my marriage to Iris?" He finished with a furious belch. King Satamonia was spitting with rage at being ignored.

R, who'd been watching the whole thing, sighed. "So now what will you do, Rekka? If you're not careful, you might start an interstellar war."

She was right. That would ruin everything. Which meant... I didn't have a choice.

I glared back at King Satamonia. "Of course I am. Because... I'm the one who's going to marry Iris!"

"Wh-What?! What are you talking about?"

“Shut up! I fell in love with her, damn it! I forced her to bring me here all the way from Earth, just so I could marry her!” That wasn’t exactly true, but it was close enough.

“I can make Iris happier than you can! There’s no way I’m giving her over to a pig-frog like you!”

“Wh-Who are you calling a pig-frog?!”

“Did that make you mad? Then—” I raised my fist towards his face and shouted as loud as I could. “—fight me for Iris!”

“W-Whaaawhuwhat?! I’ve never even heard of your little ‘Earth’ planet! Don’t you dare tell me what to do!”

“If you’re a man, then fight with your fists! Or are you happy to invade a planet with your armies, but too much of a pussy to fight an Earthling one-on-one? Hah! What a wimp!”

“Gebubububu!” His face had turned to a reddish purple, and his anger had reached its peak.

“So what’ll it be, pig-froggy?” I shouted every provocation I could think of, and clenched my shaking, sweaty hands into fists.

All my bloodline gave me was a final chance to save a story. And if there was a chance I could succeed, there was also a chance I could fail. But the only thing I could think of doing was challenging the king to a one-on-one fight.

Just looking at that Satamonian laser gun told me that his military must be every bit as strong as everyone said. In a one-on-one fight, there was a good chance he’d just turn me to ashes... but at least this way there wouldn’t be a war. In the worst case, no one would suffer but me. I could come up with a way to win later. For now, my job was to get him to agree to the fight.

“Sire, may I have a word?” His thin chief of staff, who had been silent this whole time, suddenly stepped forward.

“WHAT?!” The raging king spit saliva everywhere as he turned around, but the thin man smiled without even raising an eyebrow.

“I have an idea. Let me whisper it to you.” As the thin man began to whisper,

the king's face turned from an angry reddish purple to a normal purple, and at last, he started to smile and chuckle.

"Very well, boy. I accept your request."

"O-Okay..." My plan had worked, so why did I feel so nervous?

"But you were the one who interfered with my marriage to Iris. So I'll be the one to decide the nature of the duel."

"Fine..." Why did he look so confident? This was a longshot plan to begin with, but after the skinny guy spoke up, I was starting to feel even more worried.

And then King Satamonia opened his big mouth wide— "Tonight, at midnight, I will drop a meteor on Earth."

—and told me what the duel would be.

"Huh?" For a moment, I seriously didn't understand what he was saying. But it was less that I didn't understand, and more that I didn't want to accept what I'd just heard. I mean... a meteor?

"If you can stop the meteor, you win. If you can't, I win."

"W-W-Wait! Then if I fail, that meteor's going to hit Earth!"

"Bwahaha. Don't worry. I'll make sure it's just the right size to destroy the planet."

"That's even more of a worry, damn it!" I yelled back, but that only made him happier.

He rocked back in his chair and cackled. "Bwahahaha! Do whatever you want to try and stop it. Otherwise, it'll blow up your planet! That's what you get for making me mad!"

"W-Wait!" The screen went black and the transmission ended.

Midnight tonight? A meteor? If I failed, Earth was doomed? Did I do something really bad?

▽

The meeting with the Owaria ended after that, and I was handed over to the chairman. But instead of questioning me, he just left me with Iris and headed

back to his office. He was probably trying to do her a favor. I was grateful for that.

Iris had taken me to her room, where I sat down on a plush sofa. She'd left the room to get some drinks and something light to eat, and wasn't here right now. My watch told me that it was 5:00 PM. The meteor would be hitting Earth in seven hours.

"What the hell am I supposed to do with this?" Somebody tell me how one guy is supposed to stop a meteor, if there even is a way. "Can you think of any way to stop it, R?"

"Couldn't you strap some dynamite to yourself and slam into it?"

"I guess not." If that would work, I actually would've been willing to do it. Well, R wasn't allowed to help resolve the stories, so I hadn't expected much to begin with... but I still was desperate for any help I could get.

As I leaned back into the sofa and stared up at the ceiling, Iris came back into the room, accompanied by a floating robot carrying plates. "Rekka, are you okay?"

"Yeah..." I didn't want to worry her too much, but I didn't have enough strength left to pretend I was all right.

Iris put something that looked like drinks and cake on the table and had the robot leave the room. A few moments after we were alone, she spoke, hesitantly. "You're not going to eat?"

"Sorry. I'll just have my drink." I didn't have any appetite right now. I'd settle for wetting my parched throat.

Iris sat down next to me, touching neither the food nor the drinks. She didn't look like she was doing well, either.

"What's wrong?"

"Huh?"

"You're not looking so good."

"Not as bad as you."

“Ack! You might be right...” I scratched my head and took a glance at her.

“Does your spaceship have anything on it that can shoot down a meteor?”

“It’s capable of getting rid of space debris, but... sorry. I can’t handle a meteor.”

“I see... man, I’ve gotta do something!”

Iris seemed sad. “I’m sorry. This is my fault.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m the one to blame.”

“No... it’s my fault.”

“Huh?”

She’d gotten a lot meeker over the last few minutes. I finally looked down from the ceiling and at Iris’s face.

She was staring right back into my eyes. “Why did you save me back there? You had nothing to do with this.”

“Come on, isn’t it a little late to be asking this?”

“I’m sorry.”

“No, I’m not blaming you.” Iris seemed to be feeling guilty. Well, I could understand that, but that wasn’t how I wanted her to feel. “It’s normal to want to help a girl when she’s crying, right? Don’t worry about it.” It felt like I could’ve phrased that better, but that’s what I said.

But Iris must have been surprised by my answer, because her eyes went wide for a moment. Then, she laughed a little. “You’re pretty dumb, aren’t you, Rekka?”

“I get that a lot. I don’t agree, though.” Well, if she was smiling again, that was all that mattered. But...

“I’ve made my decision. I’m going to marry King Satamonia.”

“Huh?! What are you talking about? You hated the guy!” I wasn’t sure how to handle Iris’s sudden change of heart.

But there was a resolve hidden in her smile. “I still hate him... but at this rate,

your planet’s in danger, right? If I give myself to him, he’ll be satisfied and end this stupid game.”

“Listen...” I tried to get her to give up, but Iris was unshakable.

“But you know, I don’t want him to be my first kiss. So please, Rekka... Take my first kiss, okay?”

And now she was blushing red and telling me to kiss her. “K-K-Kiss?! No, wait! Calm down!”

“I’m serious!” Her serious expression was very pretty. Any man would be happy to kiss a girl like this.

But I summoned all my self-control to knock that desire away. If I kissed her here, she’d be satisfied and go off to marry King Satamonia. If that happened, her story would head straight for a bad ending.

The one way I could stop her was to convince her I knew how to stop the meteor. But I couldn’t come up with anything. What should I do? As I frantically worked what little brains I had to come up with an answer, something in my pocket began to vibrate.

“What?” It was the phone that Satsuki had given to me in the abandoned factory.

Chapter 4: I’m Just a Normal Guy. Can I Defeat the Ultimate Mage?

“Is that you, Satsuki?”

“Rekka! I’m so glad I got through to you!”

I hadn’t really believed it when I’d picked up the phone, but my childhood friend was on the other end of the line. I was a little curious about how I was getting cell phone coverage on planet Finerita... but that didn’t matter. “Satsuki, I’m glad you’re safe.” That, at least, was a relief.

“That’s what I was going to say! You just disappeared, and I was so worried!”

“Um... sorry.” She was right to be mad. I felt bad for mistaking Iris for her in the abandoned factory, so I just apologized.

Satsuki sighed. “So, where are you now?”

“Um... in space, I guess.”

“Huh?” I could tell from her voice that she hadn’t expected that answer.

“It’s been a busy day.” So much had happened that I didn’t think I could explain it all at once.

As I tried to come up with some way to explain things, I felt Iris angrily tugging on my shirt. “Hey, Rekka! Aren’t you talking to me right now?”

And then Satsuki on the phone said, “Huh? That was a girl’s voice. Rekka! Where are you really right now?!” The anger started to come back into her voice. Why? I had girls yelling at me in both ears, and I wasn’t sure what to do.

“Whatever. I’ll be there in a second. Then you can explain.”

“Huh? You’re coming here?” Suddenly, the phone in my hand started to glow a pale blue.

“Follow the voice, to connect here and there, and carry me to him.” I could hear what sounded like Satsuki singing, and the blue glow got stronger.

“Uwah!”

“Eeyah!”

There was a dazzling light, and a blue shadow leaped out of the phone. When the light faded, Satsuki was right in front of me.

“What? Huh?” I was astonished, but Satsuki just started to calmly look around the room. Her eyebrows were raised to begin with, but they got even higher when she saw Iris sitting next to me.

“I can’t believe you really were with a girl. Rekka, you’re going to explain this to me, aren’t you?”

“U-Um...” It had been years since I’d seen her really get mad, and I didn’t know how to handle it. I was sunk too deep into the sofa to get up and run away.

“Ooh, here comes the lover’s quarrel.” Shut up, R!

I needed to come up with a way to get out of this situation. Oh, I know! “Iris! Show Satsuki your tail! Your tail!”

“Huh? My tail?” Iris looked confused.

“Her tail? Rekka, what are you talking about?” She must’ve thought I was trying to con her somehow, because her expression became even fiercer.

I begged Iris to to show Satsuki her tail.

“I don’t mind, I guess. Here.” Iris brought out the tail that had been hidden under her butt and waved it back and forth. It shone a lush silver. Its light seemed to me like the light of salvation.

“Huh? She really has a tail... huh?” Just like I’d hoped, Satsuki’s expression turned from anger to confusion. I piled on.

“Satsuki. First, let’s talk things through, okay?”

“...Fine.”

And that’s how I got through a situation that was, in a way, more dangerous than Demon Overlords or meteors ever could be. Whew.

▽

Satsuki said she wanted to talk to me alone, so I begged Iris into leaving the room. The whole time I was begging her, she kept whacking my thighs with her tail, and she seemed really upset. Since my side of the story was so complicated — and since I still hadn't come up with a way to get her to forgive me for grabbing the wrong girl's hand at the factory— I had her tell me her side of the story first.

"You may not believe this, but..." That was how Satsuki began.

"No, don't worry. After today, I'm willing to believe almost anything." After all, I'd run into wizards, aliens, other worlds, and people from the future already.

"Hmm?" Satsuki seemed suspicious, but I told her I'd explain later and asked her to go on. "I'm... I'm actually a mage."

"I see." I'd already more or less guessed that when she'd come jumping out of the phone. It was probably magic that had let me talk to her on the phone in the first place.

She seemed a little bewildered by the fact that I believed her so easily. "Rekka, you're acting kind of weird. You hate things that aren't normal, right?"

"I still like normal best. But that doesn't mean I have to deny everything that isn't normal, right?" Even if somebody had a problem that wasn't normal, they were still normal on the inside, just like Iris and Harissa. "You know I'd never doubt anything you said, too." Satsuki blinked several times, and suddenly looked away.

"Hmm? What's wrong?"

"Never mind... just don't look at me." I could see, through the gaps in her long hair, that her cheeks were a little red.

"Did I say something I shouldn't have?"

"No... That just makes me really happy. I kept thinking forever that maybe you wouldn't believe me... that you'd think I was a weirdo and start to hate me."

"I'd never hate you. We've been friends since we were kids, right? And how long have you been worrying about this, anyway?"

"Since day care."

“Bwah?!” Why... Why was she so damn stubborn?! Why did she always have to try and keep everything to herself? That settled it. I had to save Satsuki. “So what’s with that Messiah guy? Can he use magic, too?”

“That’s right. Messiah is after the Magic of Omniscience that my family has.”

“The Magic of Omniscience?” Come to think of it, Messiah had called her the Daughter of Omniscience.

“It’s a spell. One that gives me access to the Akashic record.”

“...What’s the Akashic record?”

I could see R looking annoyed at me for interrupting with a stupid question. Sorry I’m not smart like you!

“The Akashic record records everything that’s happened in this universe since the dawn of time. You can use it to explain all of history’s mysteries, and to discover things which have been hidden from history as well. And since things are recorded in it in real-time, you could do things like use it to learn which countries are planning on starting a war.”

I only understood about half of that, but her last example was very clear. It was a very dangerous spell.

“But that’s if you used it for evil. You could also use it to find a tragedy that’s happening somewhere no one knows about it, and put a stop to it. That’s why my family’s passed it down for so long, so if the world is ever about to be destroyed, we can stop it.”

“...Wow.” Talk about a big deal. I could only gasp in amazement.

But Satsuki seemed a little upset. “But I didn’t want this magic. I wanted to be a normal girl. If I were a normal girl, I could’ve lived a normal life, and always stayed by your side. I wanted to experience a normal love, too. If not for this magic, Messiah never would have come after me...”

“Sorry, I wasn’t thinking.” Hadn’t I just said that just because somebody had a problem that wasn’t normal, that didn’t mean they weren’t a normal person? I knew better than anybody that Satsuki was a quiet, normal girl. The Magic of Omniscience was far too great a burden for her to bear.

“No... there’s no reason for you to apologize.” Satsuki shook her head. “It’s people like Messiah, who are trying to use the magic for evil, that are to blame. If it weren’t for them, we wouldn’t have to run and hide. But... I don’t think I can hide anymore. Messiah’s supposed to be the strongest mage in the world.”

Satsuki chuckled bitterly. “It’s said that he killed a god and gained its powers. His magic is strong enough to blow up a mountain and leave no traces left. There’s no way I can beat him.”

“But you managed to escape from him at the factory, right?

“My magic’s specialized for escaping at times like this... But Messiah has far more magical power than I do. I can’t keep running forever.”

“Then why not have them keep you here? We’re off Earth, after all.”

“I can’t do that. Messiah has my mom and dad. The reason he’s not using them as hostages is so that he can enjoy taking his time tracking me down. But if he never finds me, who knows what will happen to them.”

“Hmm... your mom and dad, huh? I see...” I guess she couldn’t just abandon her parents. If she couldn’t run, and she couldn’t hide, her only choice was to defeat him. But he was the strongest mage alive. Just from listening to her, I could tell that there was no hope. “So... what exactly does Messiah want? Is the Magic of Omniscience in a book or something?”

If he was after it... it must be something he could steal. Maybe if I knew what, I could come up with some kind of plan.

“Messiah is after me.”

But I didn’t expect her answer. “Huh?”

I must have had a stupid look on my face, because she continued. “Messiah wants to make a contract with me and become the Contractor of Omniscience. The Contractor is given access to the Akashic record as well.”

“Why did you make it into a system like that? Doesn’t that make it easy to steal?”

“You know how a kid gets half their genes from their mom, and half from their dad? If we wanted to make sure that a child could always use the Magic of

Omniscience, both their parents had to be able to use it.”

I see. They really put some thought into it. Wait... huh? Huh? Wait a second. Did that mean that the contract was...

“That’s right. Whoever makes the Contract of Omniscience with me becomes my partner for life.”

“Wh-What?!” Five or six of my blood vessels almost burst. “That fake-ass noble! He’s gonna pay!”

“Rekka, calm down.” But Satsuki was still calm. She motioned for me to relax and continued. “I’m really happy that you’re getting mad over me. But you can’t beat Messiah. You’re not a mage. You’re a normal human being.”

“Grr!” She was right. It was infuriating, but the Namidare bloodline didn’t give me any special powers. I didn’t have any ability that would let me fight a mage.

But that didn’t mean I was just going to give Satsuki to him! “...There’s one way.” Satsuki moved closer to me. I could see there was resolve in her eyes.

We were sitting on a big sofa, but it was still just a sofa. All she had to do to close the distance between us was slide over a little. I could feel her breath on my shoulder.

As she stared at me, her cheeks flushed, my heart skipped a beat. “Wh-What’s that?”

Her cheeks got even more flushed. “You... and me... can make the contract first.”

“Y-You and me? C-C-Contract?”

“My parents lost the ability to use the magic after I was born. In other words, I’m the only person in the world who has it. And there can only be one Contractor. If I make the contract with you before he forces me to do it with him, he won’t attack me anymore.”

“No, wait! I get the idea, but if I’m your lifelong partner, does that mean...” If I started imagining dirty things at that, who could blame me?

Satsuki must’ve been able to tell what I was thinking, too. Her face looked like a boiled egg. “Rekka, you dummy,” she said. “W-We wouldn’t do that right

away! I-I'm not some kind of pervert!"

"R-Right. Sorry. There's a more peaceful way to do it, right?" That made me feel a lot better.

"Tch," R clicked her tongue.

Seriously, knock it the hell off! I just coughed a little. "So what do we do for this contract?"

"Kiss."

"Huh?"

"...Kiss." No matter how many times I asked, the answer didn't change.

"Kiss... like, the band?"

"No. The other kind of kiss."

Which one? The one for grown-ups? By now, Satsuki was leaning into me. I was sunk deep into the sofa again, and there was no way to escape.

"Do you not want to kiss me?"

"It's not that I don't want to, it's um... uh!" My mind was in chaos as I frantically searched for a way to get her to stop. "You can't kiss someone like this, right? And if you kiss a guy like me, it'll hurt you."

"That's not true."

"Huh?"

"I wouldn't ask anyone else to do this. Only you." Her face was right in front of me.

"S-Satsuki?"

"I'm okay with this because it's you..."

"Um, uh... well..."

"I want it to be you."

My mind was a total blank. What was I trying to do again? Kiss my childhood friend? Huh? Why?

“Kiss! Kiss!” R was clapping and laughing at me.

Shut up and leave me alone, damn it!

Soon Satsuki’s lips were so close, they were almost touching me.

I had to stop her, but I didn’t know how. My mind was too blank for me to come up with any way to stop this, so I was just about ready to give in.

And then the door blew up.

The owner of the room, Iris, came flying in. It seemed that she'd been spying on us, and for some reason, she looked pissed. "Hey, you! What do you think you're doing, trying to steal my Rekka?"

"...Your Rekka?" Satsuki's eyes narrowed when she heard Iris's words.

She moved a little away from me. That was a small relief, but I had the feeling that things were only about to get worse.

"Rekka, what does she mean?" Satsuki had a scary look on her face. It was the exact opposite of how she'd been before.

And then Iris interrupted. "I SAID, what are you doing to my Rekka?!"

And now Satsuki's rage was directed at Iris. "What's your relationship with Rekka, anyway?"

"He's my lover!"

"The Rekka I know wouldn't make a move on a girl he'd just met! He wouldn't make a move on anybody, so he can't be your lover."

"We're real lovers now! Rekka put his life on the line for me! And we're both in love now!"

"Well, then, I'm his childhood friend. I've been with him since we were little kids, so I'm above you."

"What do you mean, above?"

"I mean above. I've even taken baths with him."

"Huh? You can take baths with other people? I never heard about this! Then I'm gonna do it, too!"

No, I didn't feel like going into Iris's washing machine-style bath with another person. We'd probably hit our heads together. And wait... "That was when we were little kids, though."

"Rekka, shut up!"

"Rekka, shut up!"

Why were they both in harmony there? At that point, I gave up. I decided to

just let them have at it.

“I’m cuter, so Rekka will choose me,” Iris said.

“Rekka wouldn’t choose someone based on their appearance,” Satsuki said.

“Stop acting like you know everything there is to know about Rekka,” Iris said.

“I do know everything about him. I even know that there’s a hair growing out of a mole on his back,” Satsuki said.

Wait, seriously? I reached my hand around to my back to check.

“You flat-chest!”

“Don’t insult another person’s breasts. Besides, they’re average.”

I didn’t even know what they were arguing about anymore.

“And anyway, you don’t need to kiss Rekka! You just need to beat that Messiah guy!” Iris was throwing a tantrum and pointing her finger at Satsuki’s face while she spoke.

“If only it were that easy. He’s the strongest mage not just because of his attack magic. His defensive magic is even more powerful.”

“...What does that mean?” I interrupted.

“Remember how you flung that pipe at him at the factory and it didn’t work at all? That was his magic wall. It covers his whole body and stops any attack, physical or magical, from reaching him. It’s so powerful that even a hundred mages working together couldn’t break it.”

“I’m not quite sure what a hundred mages would look like... but like, how strong is that?”

“Hmm... for example, if there was an attack powerful enough to destroy Earth, he’d be the only survivor? Though I guess even he would be in bad shape without oxygen.”

So basically, even a bomb that could blow up Earth wouldn’t be good enough? He really was the strongest mage. There was no way I could beat him on my own.

But ironically, that ‘attack that would destroy Earth’ was just what King Satamonia was about to do. One of the two was bad enough. How the hell was I

supposed to deal with bo— huh?

“Huh?”

And then I got an idea. It was the one advantage I’d had, which I’d figured out in the other world. I was caught up in multiple stories, and I didn’t need to be bound by the rules of just one.

Just as I’d defeated the Demon Overlord with a laser gun, maybe I could defeat the meteor and the mage by ignoring their rules? I thought back over everything I’d experienced today. The things I’d seen, the items I’d used, the items I hadn’t used, the people I’d met... they were all coming together, like the pieces of a puzzle.

Could I... Could I do it? No, I still didn’t have enough pieces. Was there something I could use? One last thing?

And then suddenly I remembered Harissa. “That’s right! Harissa could help me!”

“Huh? Rekka?”

“What’s wrong?” I realized that both Iris and Satsuki had stopped their argument and were staring at me. They must’ve gotten worried when I stopped talking and started thinking.

I told them I was fine, and asked Satsuki a question instead. “Satsuki, the Magic of Omniscience can tell you about anything except the future, right?”

“Huh? Yeah, that’s right.”

“Then there’s something I want you to look up for me. Thanks.”

“Okay, but... Rekka, what are you going to do?”

I started to explain my plan to them. In order for it to make sense, I explained to them everything I’d experienced today, and the bloodline of the Namidare, too. Suddenly their faces clouded.

“Then you saved me because of that bloodline?” Iris looked a little uneasy.

Satsuki wasn’t saying anything either, but she was looking at me, worried.

Maybe they were feeling guilty that I’d been forced to solve their problems

against my will? “Don’t worry about it. My bloodline may have gotten me into this, but I really do want to save you.”

That was true. I had the right to give up on a story. Since I hadn’t, this was my own responsibility. So there was no need for them to worry about it. At least, that’s what I tried to say.

“I see! Wow, you really are cool, Rekka.”

“I’m glad you’re here for me, too.”

They both started to smile again... but was I imagining it, or were they blushing? Well, whatever! I just had to make sure this worked. I asked them both for their opinions.

“I think you can do it!” Iris said, optimistically.

“...It’s going to be close, but it’s not impossible,” Satsuki agreed.

With the two of them on my side cheering me on, I steeled myself for what was to come.

“Okay. Then we just have to do it!”

It was up to me to make these stories have a happy ending!

Chapter 5: The Stories Start to Intertwine

While I had Satsuki gather the information I needed, there was someplace I needed to go.

“I didn’t expect to be heading back so fast.” I looked at the red thread on my wrist. If I wished for it enough while wearing it, I could go back to Harissa’s world.

My watch said it was just a little past six. There were just six more hours until the meteor strike. If I wanted my plan to work, I needed to get a certain item from her world.

I had Iris show me to the courtyard so that I could use the red thread.

“All right, time to go.”

“Yes, let’s.”

For some reason, Iris was wrapping herself around my arm. She seemed excited.

“Iris, if you keep clinging to me like that, you’re going to get dragged to the other world.”

“That’s exactly why I’m doing it.”

“I’m not exactly going there to play.”

She had her fancy bag on her shoulder, and seemed to think she was going on a little trip. I tried to get her to wait here, but instead she just got mad.

“You already defeated the Demon Overlord, right? So it’ll be fine. I had Daddy give me all my tools back. It sounds fun! And I’m definitely not letting you leave me again!” She pressed herself against me some more.

H-Her breasts! I wasn’t sure how to handle the soft feeling on my upper arm, but I was happy to see she was feeling better. I didn’t expect this to be dangerous, so I guess it wouldn’t hurt to take her.

“Fine. I’ll take you, so get off me a little.”

“Pussy,” R said.

I wanted to tell her to take her flat chest and shove it.

But instead, I ignored her, grabbed Iris’s hand, and made a wish on the red thread. “Take me to Harissa.”

The bracelet started to shine. And then a single ray of red light— a red thread, just like the name— stretched out into the air and formed a circle with a one-meter radius. I could see what looked like dancing flames on the other side. The red opening instantly swallowed us up.

▽

When I opened my eyes, I was back in the castle at Aburaamu. The red thread frayed and fell from my arm. Evidently, it could only be used once.

“Wow... That felt pretty different from a warp, huh?” Iris seemed impressed. She was staring at the stone walls around her, her eyes shining with curiosity.

“H-Hero?!” I heard a voice behind me.

“Are you the cook?”

I turned around and saw the old cook who’d been worried about Harissa. She was blinking in surprise at our sudden arrival.

“Huh?” I had been sure it would take me directly to Harissa. Well, I guess I could just ask. “Excuse me. Do you know where Harissa is?”

“She’s gone.”

I didn’t expect the answer I got.

“Huh? Why?”

Her expression got sterner after I asked the question. “Because of you!”

“Me?”

“Because you’re a fake! They said Harissa’s a liar, and they’re going to execute her!” Her shoulders were shaking with rage. But her anger quickly turned to sorrow, and she covered her face with both hands and started to cry. “It’s your

fault! It's your fault!"

"Why are they saying that Harissa's a liar? Please, tell me!" Harissa and I had defeated the Demon Overlord. I thought I'd brought Harissa's story to its end.

But when I heard what she had to say, I realized how stupid I'd been. "I didn't draw the Hero's Sword, so they refused to accept me as the hero?" That was what it came down to.

The warp watch had malfunctioned, and so the two of us had gone into the Demon Overlord's castle and defeated him without anybody knowing. It had only taken a little over two hours. Thinking back, nobody would believe that happened unless they were there. And worse still, I hadn't drawn the Hero's Sword to prove I was the hero.

Harissa had summoned a normal-looking kid like me, and I'd vanished from the castle in only two hours. And the Hero's Sword was still on its dais, too. What would happen then?

"They all think you got scared, turned tail, and ran!" Of course. Everybody would think that.

And since Harissa had failed to summon the hero, she was going to be executed, as was originally planned.

"She kept saying you were the real hero right up until the end. But nobody believed her, so she gave me this red thread before they took her to the execution grounds."

"Damn it!" I'd been in such a hurry, I'd forgotten to explain things to the king and his men!

"Wait, Rekka! Where are you going?" I shook Iris's hand off my sleeve.

"I have to go save Harissa!"

"But they all think you ran, right? If you go now and say you defeated the Demon Overlord, they're not going to believe you, are they?"

I froze like somebody had dumped cold water on my head. She was right. Now that they thought I was a liar, they wouldn't believe me without proof.

Calm down! Think. Think about what you have to do. The first thing I needed

was prove that I was a hero. The other was prove that I'd defeated the Demon Overlord. I needed the latter especially, and if I was going to get it, I needed to go to the Demon Overlord's castle.

"Crap! I forgot the warp watch!" The Self-Defense Fleet had taken all my stuff when I'd arrived at the Owaria. I was starting to panic when Iris poked my shoulder.

"I have the warp watch with me."

"Huh? Really?!" I didn't see anything on her wrist.

"All my tools are in here." She took the warp watch out of her bag. "This bag uses wormhole technology, so it can hold anything. I've got a laser gun each for you and me in here, too. I've also got snacks, drinks, shampoo, and a change of clothes."

Wormholes connected two points in space, right? My guess was that anything put in the bag was sent to another place, where it could be retrieved whenever she wanted it. Alien technology was incredible.

I took the warp watch and said thanks to Iris. Okay, now I had my means of getting to the Demon Overlord's castle.

"All right, let's get the Hero's Sword first! Ma'am, can you take us to the basement where the Hero's Sword is sealed?"

"Huh? I... I guess." She quickly nodded.

"Thank you. Let's hurry!"

The cook led us down into the castle's basement. The Hero's Sword was kept in a surprisingly small room, only about two meters to a side. In the center was a dais that seemed to be carved from solid rock, and there was a two-handed sword buried within it.

"This is the Hero's Sword?"

"That's right. Thousands of people have tried to draw it, but nobody can."

Since nobody could draw the sword, they didn't even put a guard in front of the room. That meant that all we had to do to get in was use the laser gun to blow off the lock. Okay, time to pull this thing out and go to the Demon

Overlord’s castle.

I grabbed the hilt and pulled it... and it wouldn’t come out! “Huh?” Next, I tried pulling it with both hands.

“Fnnnggghh!” It moved a little, but it still wouldn’t come out.

Huh? What was going on here?

“Y-You really are a fake!” The cook was sobbing.

Hang on a second. I might have been a normal person, but I was summoned here to save the world. Shouldn’t I be able to pull out the sword? I did what I always did when I didn’t know what was going on, and turned to R for help.

“Hmm? I’m not sure why. Perhaps it’s because you’re advancing multiple stories at the same time?”

Wait. So since I wasn’t the hero of this story alone, I didn’t quite have the right to pull out the sword? Or was it because I wasn’t the real hero, and just their standin? This wasn’t part of the plan, and it was very bad news.

In the worst case, could I just bring proof that I’d defeated the Demon Overlord to the execution grounds? No, if they told me it was fake, I’d be finished. The Demon Overlord hadn’t left his castle since he’d come back to life, and nobody in Aburaamu had seen him. You’d think anybody who saw that huge dragon would be convinced, but since they thought I was a liar already, they’d probably get suspicious. If I was going to convince them, I needed to be the hero.

“When was the Hero’s Sword sealed, and why, anyway?” If I wanted an out, I needed information, and I needed it fast.

“Well, it was sealed by the Legendary Hero for when the Demon Overlord revived.” The old cook was still sobbing as she spoke, with snot running down her face.

“He could’ve just thrown it in a treasure chest somewhere. Why’d he put it in this rock?”

“I don’t know. Maybe to keep people from using it for evil?”

That didn’t help me. Was this the end? I needed the Hero’s Sword to stop the meteor, too! If only the Legendary Hero hadn’t put this seal on it... wait. Seal?

“Hey, if it’s sealed, does that mean this sword’s stuck in here with magic?”

“Of course it is. If it was just stuck in there on its own, a strong man could pull it out.”

The reason I couldn’t pull out the sword was that I was acting as the protagonist of multiple stories. That meant I didn’t have the right to be the hero, and so the seal was stopping me from pulling it out.

But I’d forgotten something important. It was my one advantage. There was no need to break the seal on the magic sword.

I just needed to get the sword itself. I had the high-tech items that Iris had brought me from Finerita. Take out. Move. Transport. What tool could do that?

“Iris, put coordinates into the warp watch.”

I offered her the arm that was wearing the warp watch, and with my other hand, I grabbed the Hero’s Sword.

“What should I put in?”

“I just need to move about a meter.”

“Got it.” Iris had the coordinates entered in under a second.

“Coordinate entry confirmed. Ten seconds to warp. Nine. Eight. Seven...” The electronic voice started its countdown. It felt like it was taking forever, and I kicked the floor in frustration.

It felt like an eternity, but after ten seconds I warped. Since I’d only moved a meter, I was still in the room. But now, the Hero’s Sword was in my hands.

“Yes!” Iris had said aboard her spaceship that the warp watch could transport what you were carrying. The dais was carved out of the ground, so it was part of the ground. And so, I’d warped carrying only the Hero’s Sword.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-What’s going on?!” The cook seemed very confused, but I didn’t have time to explain.

“Iris, the next thing I want to do is go to the Demon Overlord’s castle.”

“I could calculate that fast, if I had a map of this world.”

“Then let’s go to the study. Hurry!” I ran out of the room, carrying the Hero’s

Sword, but before I did, I said, “Ma’am, I promise I’ll save Harissa!” And then I ran to the top of the western tower where the study was.

▽

By the time I got back from the Demon Overlord’s castle, Harissa was about to be executed.

She was on her knees on the execution platform, her arms and head locked in the stocks. She looked exhausted. Behind her, the executioner stood silently. A bunch of idiots had gathered in the plaza to watch the execution.

It was too packed for me to get through on my own, but Iris made a path by picking people up and tossing them aside, so I was able to run straight up to the platform. Behind the platform was the castle balcony. One of the ministers was up there, reading something off a scroll. He was probably reading out a list of Harissa’s crimes. When he was done, the executioner would bring the ax down on her neck.

I wasn’t going to let that happen. I’d thought I’d ended Harissa’s misery and her story. She was supposed to be happy now. I wasn’t going to let it end like this!

The minister rolled up the scroll and sent a signal to the man on the platform.

He took his huge ax and moved next to her. It didn’t look very sharp, and the blade was covered in scratches, but the weight alone would be enough to make sure it went right through her thin neck.

“Hold it!” I yelled, but my voice was erased by the roar of the crowd.

He raised the ax high. I yelled again, but no one could hear me. Damn it! Screw this!

Harissa, fight! Why are you just sitting there?! I knew she was a crybaby, but she wasn’t crying. There was no expression on her face at all.

It was the face of someone who’d given up on everything. She closed her eyes, as if in anticipation of her coming death. That idiot!

“I said, don’t give up!”

Clang!

Gah! It's heavy! That ax is really heavy! I was lucky I managed to block it without my sword snapping. That's just what I'd want from a Hero's Sword.

But the masked executioner showed no sign of hesitation. He raised the ax again. That's when Iris jumped in.

"What do you think you're doing to my Rekka?!"

She gave him a vicious jump kick! She may have been a girl, but she had several times the strength of any Earthling. Her kick sent the executioner flying clean off the platform.

"Hero?" Harissa looked up at me, as if she couldn't believe her eyes.

I wanted to say hello, but first, I had to deal with all the soldiers that were surrounding me. They were my first priority. I looked up at the king and the other ministers on the balcony.

"Hey, king, you know what sword this is, right?!"

I raised the Hero's Sword that I'd just used to block that giant ax, and the men on the balcony, and the crowd too, started to whisper to one another. Evidently, the Hero's Sword was just like the legend of the hero, and everyone knew it.

That made this easier. My first plan had been to persuade the king that I was the hero, but it would be better to just stir up the people.

"I am the hero, chosen by the Hero's Sword! I was summoned here by the great wizard Harissa Hope, and I have just come from the Demon Overlord's castle, where I fought to save the people of this world!"

The crowd got louder. The hero had appeared, gone to the Overlord's castle, and returned... I could see the hope in their eyes.

"Do not be fooled, my people!" One of the ministers on the balcony shouted.

It was the old guy who'd doubted that I was the hero the first time I came here. He had a mustache and beard, so it was easy to recognize him.

"That child was only summoned here this morning! Even if he was the hero, he couldn't make it there and back in such a short time!"

Normally, he'd have a point.

“Shut up, Mustache! I’m the hero! I can do whatever I want!” But I just yelled right back at him.

If I had more time, I could’ve told him about the technology I’d used, but just like before, time was running out. That’s why I needed proof, and I needed it now.

“Iris, bring it out.”

“Leave it to me!” She opened her bag and pointed it in a direction where no one was standing.

There was a huge thud, and the whole plaza shook. Out of the bag’s wormhole appeared the roasted head of the dragon. It was bigger than a grown man, and an impressive sight. Even if you’d never actually seen the Demon Overlord, you would surely believe that this was his head.

The people in the plaza forgot even to panic. They all looked at the Demon Overlord's head in shock. The man who brought them this was the man who pulled the sword out of the stone. Nobody pointed out that there was no proof that this was the Overlord's head.

I thought that the mustached man might try complaining again, but I'd cut open the barrier around the Demon Overlord's castle when I was testing the sword. Without the barrier, anyone could go inside the castle, where they'd find the rest of the burnt body. Then nobody would be able to call Harissa a liar.

I raised the sword high, and the sun glinted off the blade. "I have defeated the Demon Overlord! There is no more need to fear his demons!"

It was a few seconds later when the cheers began.

▽

We got out of the plaza before we could be surrounded by the cheering people. Harissa was having trouble walking, so I carried her in my arms. First, we moved someplace empty, and then we met up with the old cook.

"Harissa! I'm so glad..."

"Ma'am..."

Harissa grabbed the crying old cook, and they both rejoiced in her safety.

I sighed in relief. I'd managed to get her out okay.

"I'm sorry for doubting you, Hero." The old cook apologized as she cried.

"Nah, it's fine. I'm just glad Harissa's safe."

"T-T-Thank you, Hero!" Harissa thanked me with tears coming down her face. Dark stains were forming on her flimsy prisoner's robe.

"Hey, don't cry," I teased her.

"When I'm in front of you, I always sweat and cry!" She smiled, just a little, and wiped her tears away with her sleeve. "You saved me again, Hero."

"Don't worry about it."

"But... but... I said that I'd save you this time!"

“Harissa... if you really want to pay me back, would you come with me to Earth?”

“Earth?”

“The world I’m from. It’s in great danger right now, and I need your help to save it.” I felt a little like I was taking advantage of her, but I really did need her help.

“You really need me?”

“Yeah, I do!”

“Okay!” She rubbed her eyes with her sleeve, and smiled with a red face.

“I’ll do anything to help you! Please, let me help save your Earth!”

“Thanks! First, let’s get your clothes and your staff.”

Now I had the cards I needed. It was time for the biggest game of my life.

Chapter 6: A Long Way From a Hero

By the time Harissa used her sending magic to get us back to my world, and Iris's warp got us back to Earth, it was past 11:00. We just barely made it in time for the meteor.

I'd already had Satsuki find out how King Satamonia was going to drop it. His plan, she said, was to use some kind of meteor cannon loaded aboard a spaceship to launch it at a high speed, and then use teleportation to make it appear right in Earth's skies.

According to her, that spaceship was already parked several million kilometers away from Earth. It would only be four or five minutes until it hit. Normally, it was impossible to predict the path a meteor like this might take, and by the time you noticed it, it would have already hit you. But this terrifying weapon took time to prepare. It was a sign of how nasty a guy King Satamonia was.

The meteor his spaceship was readying was around fifteen kilometers long. It was almost the same size as the one that had caused the dinosaurs to go extinct.

We headed right under the impact point to stop it. Satsuki, Harissa, and I went down to the surface, and Iris stayed in space aboard her spaceship. I had another job for her.

"Whew..." I looked around. It had been a while since I'd seen Earth.

Geography wasn't my thing, so I didn't know where I was, but it was a big open field dotted with cherry trees. It must have been in a different time zone than Japan, because the moon was only starting to rise.

This was where I was going to stop King Satamonia's meteor, and finish things with Messiah. The three of us finished our preparations for the last battle. Satsuki and I sat down under a big cherry tree, and Harissa became invisible and hid.

All we had to do now was wait for Messiah to answer Satsuki's magical summons.

I was so nervous about the battle that my throat was choking up. So was Satsuki, it seemed. Neither of us spoke.

“Why not say something to make her feel better?” R whispered to me.

I turned toward my childhood friend. She sat there, unmoving and staring at a single point on the ground, as she whispered something in a soft voice. That was her habit when she was really nervous. Yeah... if neither of us said anything, we’d go crazy before the fight started, and then we’d have no hope of winning at all.

I looked up at the tree as I spoke. “I guess they’ve got cherry blossom trees outside of Japan, huh?”

Satsuki jumped a little at my voice, and then looked up from the ground toward the tree above her. “You can find them all over the warm parts of the northern hemisphere. I guess this is the same kind of tree we’ve got in Japan, huh?”

“Oh, hey. The cherry blossom trees at the high school were in full bloom. You didn’t come to school today, so you didn’t get to see them, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Let’s go see them tomorrow.”

“Yeah.” She smiled just a little.

The heavy weight on our shoulders got just a little bit lighter.

“At this point, we’ve just gotta see this through.” I balled my hands into fists and took a deep breath. “I’ll protect you, Satsuki.”

“Thanks, Rekka.”

And the climax of the stories silently came. Ten minutes before midnight, a man came down from the sky and landed on the ground before us: Messiah Kyandistrapps, the strongest mage of the modern era. I hadn’t seen him for eleven hours or so, but he still had that stupid smirk on his face.

He seemed a little surprised to see me. “You’re that boy, huh? I thought you ran away.”

“Haha...”

Well, from his perspective, that's probably what it looked like at the abandoned factory. I had ended up running and leaving Satsuki behind, after all.

"Why would I run from a pussy like you?" But I laughed, instead. I could see Messiah's eyebrows twitch.

"A pussy, you say?"

"Yup. Why would I run from some idiot wannabe who thinks he's the strongest mage in the world?"

"Oh? Then who might you be, then?"

"I'm the strongest mage in the world, obviously."

"What?"

My words were an obvious provocation. I was the one who'd used Satsuki's magic to summon him here. Normally, that would make you suspect a trap, but I figured he'd fall for my provocations.

He was confident that he was the strongest mage. That he wouldn't lose, no matter who he fought, or what kind of trap they set. That's why he'd come.

"So what do you want to do with me?" Messiah chuckled.

I twisted my lips into the most evil-looking grin I could muster. "I want you to make a contract and duel me. The loser swears to never bother Satsuki again. That, and to release her parents."

Satsuki had told me that contracts between mages were based on demonic contracts, and that even the strongest mage couldn't break one. If I could beat Messiah under such a contract, he'd have no choice but to leave her alone.

"Very well, boy. But—" Messiah raised a finger. "Why don't we add a condition that the Daughter of Omniscience must always obey the winner of the duel?"

"What?! You..." Of course, I tried to tell him where he could stuff his condition, but Satsuki interrupted me.

"It's fine. I believe in you. So I don't mind at all." She looked at me and smiled kindly.

It would be really lame if I couldn't say something here. "Leave it to me." I

couldn’t lose this fight.

“Now, agree to the duel contract.” Satsuki stood between me and Messiah, and performed the ritual.

“I assent,” I said.

“Of course, I assent,” Messiah said.

Both of us nodded, and Satsuki changed the spell to complete the contract. Translucent black chains rose out of the ground and wrapped themselves around us, binding something within our bodies. Supposedly, if we broke the contract, the chains would rip our souls apart.

The stage was set for the duel. I had Satsuki step back so that she wouldn’t get caught up in it.

“Rekka, don’t die, okay?” She said to me, with tears in her eyes.

I laughed. “Hey, I’m going to win, right? So there’s no need to worry.”

“You’re right. Good luck, Rekka.”

“Sure thing.” She moved back fifty meters or so, and prepared to watch the duel.

Messiah and I squared off, the cherry blossom tree standing between us in the background.

“I can tell at a glance that you’ve no talent for magic. I don’t know what it is you’re planning, but you’re about to learn that the tricks of the incompetent are of no use against me.”

“Heh... I can’t wait to see the look on your face when I kick your ass.” I laughed again and took a quick glance at my watch.

Five minutes to midnight. Everything was on track.

“Here I go!” I broke into a run and started to go clockwise around the cherry tree. As I ran, I drew the laser gun from my belt. Harissa had made it invisible for me, and Iris had adjusted it to tone down its power. I pulled the trigger, and a spear of light flew at Messiah.

“Oh?” But the defensive wards in front of him blocked it. I’d expected this, but

still, Messiah's defenses were incredible. "I thought you had no talent. Was I wrong?"

He seemed a little surprised, but not at the attack. He was surprised at the fact that I'd used, or seemed to have used, magic. He had totally underestimated me.

He raised a hand to shoulder height. "Now it's my turn."

I started to run as fast as I could to escape from his fingers.

"It's useless. Unless, of course, you can run faster than light." Pale sparks started to appear in the air around him. The sparks grew into small bolts of lightning that wrapped around his arm. "This is the end."

A blast of lightning headed straight for me. The fastest man on Earth couldn't escape from a bolt of lightning.

That's why I had a trick ready.

The lightning turned away from me and crashed into the ground.

"Agghh!" I'd avoided being directly hit, but the shock of the lightning's impact had kicked up dirt and small stones, and some of them had hit me. I'd quickly moved my arms to protect myself, but my whole body felt like I'd been punched. I didn't think I could take too many hits like that, but I'd survived this one.

"I missed?"

Messiah seemed confused. He'd intended to end this in a single strike.

"Hah! You suck!" I yelled as loudly as I could, as blood poured from my forehead and biceps.

He sent two or three more spears of lightning my way. My taunts must have been getting to him. All of them bent away to the left or right. None of them hit me.

The trick was a simple one. Satsuki had told me in advance that Messiah's favorite type of magic was lightning magic. So I'd seeded the ground with powerful space lightning rods that Iris had prepared for me.

Even magic lightning was still lightning. It would be drawn toward a lightning rod before it would go after a human body.

Normally, the rods would be easy to spot, but Harissa's magic had made them invisible, too. And thanks to my laser gun, Messiah was convinced I could use magic. As long as he was under that suggestion, he would think I was using magic to deflect his lightning.

Of course, if he used anything other than lightning, I was screwed, but the difference in our strengths was obvious. I couldn't hurt him, and he could keep attacking me as long as he liked. Since there was no chance of him losing, he'd probably put his pride ahead of his victory, and keep using his favorite type of magic.

I couldn't count on that to last forever. But I didn't need it to last forever. I just needed it to last for a little while! Only thirty seconds left until midnight!

"Messiah!" I screamed his name, and pointed for him to look up at the heavens.

"What?" Messiah froze and followed my finger.

My plan was a simple one: to tell him that King Satamonia's meteor was my own magic. The proud Messiah would then destroy "my" meteor for me. All right, time to get your butt to work, mage!

"Can you stop my magic?!" I lowered my index finger down from the sky to make it look like I was doing something. Say, strike him with the falling meteor. Now all that was left was to see if he really was the strongest mage of the modern era. It was weird, but at this point, I had no choice but to believe in him.

But instead, Messiah just stared at me. "So where is your magic?"

"Huh?" I looked up to the sky in panic. All I could see was a full moon and the shining stars. There was no sign of any meteor.

I stopped myself from screaming and turned to R for help, but she just shook her head. Just when I really needed her, too. Come on, give me a hand here!

Messiah laughed at me. "I've figured you out. Everything you do is a bluff. It's all an act, a farce. And as long as you maintain the farce, you're fine. But as soon it ends, you're nothing."

He was right. I clenched my trembling hands into fists.

“Enough of this, boy.” He raised his hand up to the sky.

A swirl of electricity, so powerful it could be seen with the naked eye, began to form. The sparks of lightning began to collide, growing larger and forming into a ball.

Was this the thing he’d tried to use at the factory? But this time, it was several times bigger.

A lightning sun. I didn’t know if those were the right words for it, but I could tell that touching that thing at all would fry me with billions of volts, and there would be nothing left. There was no way those lightning rods could stop that thing. This was the power of the world’s strongest mage.

He looked at me with arrogance in his eyes. “You’ve done well... for one so powerless, that is. You may boast of your bravery in the next world.”

“Powerless, huh?” He was right, and I knew it.

In the end, I was just a fake. A long way from a hero. I wasn’t special. With only the slightest flaw in my plan, I was just a helpless boy.

But still, I didn’t relax my clenched fists. These fists were a bluff, too. I’d never been in a real fight in my life. I’d spent my whole life trying not to stand out, so that was only natural.

But my hands were always ready to become fists. Anyone can make a fist, when they want to protect someone. When you make a fist for someone you want to protect, you can fight anything— a mage, a meteor, or even a demon overlord from another world. Even if I wasn’t a real hero, I could still fight anything.

I threw away my invisible laser gun, and started to run as fast as I could with my empty fists. But not toward Messiah.

“Haha, it’s too late to run!” I ignored Messiah’s laugh, and ran as fast as I could towards a single point.

Since that spaceship was already here, it was hard to imagine that King Satamonia’s threat was a bluff. So where was the meteor? My guess was that he hadn’t intended for it to land at midnight. Midnight was when he launched it. So

if I could just withstand this one last attack, there was still a chance!

“Rekka!”

“Stay out of this!” I yelled, both at Satsuki, who was trying to run towards me, and Harissa, who was invisible and hiding.

I needed to beat Messiah by myself, or the contract wouldn’t be valid. Anything I planned in advance was allowed, but if someone else intervened in the duel, everything would be ruined.

“Thank you for leaving the Daughter of Omniscience out of this. I don’t want her getting killed, either. Boy, you are quite brave. Stupidly so, in fact.” Messiah laughed and slowly lowered his hand. “You made an excellent clown. Now die!”

“Nwaaaahhh!” I jumped and slid along the ground under the cherry tree.

“Haha! It’s not real lightning! You cannot escape my ‘Divine Judgement’ spell by hiding under a tree!” And then, a hammer of lightning came down, as if heaven was visiting divine punishment upon a sinner.

It was a brilliant light that swallowed everything. The nightmarish lightning burned everything around me. The tree and the surrounding ground were utterly annihilated, and the air was filled with smoke and a burning stench.

I couldn’t move. I couldn’t tell if I was alive or dead. There was a strange feeling, like I was floating. It made it hard to think. What happened? Did I fail?

“Now there is no one left to interrupt our wedding. Come with me, and give me the wisdom of omniscience!” I heard Messiah’s voice. The sound of his melodramatic words pulled me back to reality.

He was still talking, but Satsuki wasn’t saying anything. That’s right. There’s no need to say a word. Just you wait, I’ll...!

I tried to move, but my body wasn’t responding. Why, damn it? Was I dead after all? It still felt like there was nothing in my hands.

“None can resist the contract. Disobey, and you’ll be ripped apart from the inside out. Are you all right with that?” All I could do was just listen to Messiah’s voice.

“Give up, Daughter of Omniscience.”

Her name isn't "Daughter of Omniscience," it's Satsuki.

"You have no choice but to become my bride."

Hell no. Satsuki's my childhood friend.

"Or if you find it so painful to become my bride, shall I use my magic to rip out your mind and turn you into a living doll? All I need is the Magic of Omniscience. I don't care about the rest of you."

If you don't shut up, I'm going to kick your ass. Marriage is something you do to make both people happy. That's the normal way. But you just see Satsuki as a tool. As her childhood friend, there's no way I'm letting you get away with that!

My rage passed the boiling point and woke up my mind. I clenched my fists tightly and stood up in the smoke.

"That's the worst damn proposal I've ever heard in my life."

"What?!"

I knocked the dust off my clothes as I listened to Messiah's shocked voice. I was covered in soot, but mostly unharmed. Evidently, the impact had just knocked me unconscious.

"H-How?!" I saw Messiah truly astonished for the first time that day.

"There's no time for surprise, asshole." I pointed up into the night sky one more time.

The moonlight around us vanished, and the world was shrouded in darkness. In the next instant, the light came back. This time, it wasn't the gentle light of the moon and stars. It was a fiercer light, the burning crimson flame of a meteor as it scorched its way through the atmosphere toward Earth.

"This is my magic, for real this time!"

"—?!"

All right. Time for you to shine, "strongest mage." Time for you to save the Earth.

"Damn it! What is this magic?!" Messiah acted fast. He formed several dozen of his "Divine Judgment" bolts at once. "No one can defeat Messiah

Kyandistrapps!”

The balls of lightning smashed into the surface of the burning red meteor. The whole night sky was lit up with the resulting blasts. The mage’s lightning was gradually whittling away the alien’s massive meteor. It was like something out of a light novel or manga. Yet it couldn’t have been more than a few minutes before it was all over.

“No one can match me in magic!” At last, Messiah shattered the final fragment of the meteor into pieces. “Hahh... hahh... hahh... hahh...” He staggered, panting. He didn’t fall to his knees, but his arrogant attitude was gone.

Most of the fragments of the meteor would probably burn up in the atmosphere. Even if something did survive, Iris was waiting in her spaceship to take out the smaller chunks.

My plan to destroy the meteor was a success. All that was left was to defeat the strongest mage.

“Aarrhhhh!” I screamed and leaped out of the smoke.

“What?!” Messiah spun around in shock. He hadn’t seen me coming.

He’d used a tremendous amount of magical power and concentration to destroy the meteor, and when he succeeded, he would let his guard down for a single instant. That was my only chance.

He didn’t have time to fight back with his magic. My attack would hit him first. Normally, the battle would’ve ended here.

But Messiah just grinned slightly. He still had his defensive wards. Satsuki had told me that a hundred mages working together couldn’t destroy them. That was what made him the strongest of them all, and that was why he was smiling.

So I—

I swung the invisible Hero’s Sword right through Messiah’s wards, and ripped them wide open.

“Wh-What?!”

I heard the shock in his voice as I turned my hand around. It was another simple trick. I’d had Harissa turn the Hero’s Sword invisible and plant it at the

base of the cherry tree. That was all. The Hero's Sword could cut through any magic, and in a battle against a mage, it had the potential to be my trump card. But if I'd used it from the start to block all his magic, it would've put him on his guard. That's why I'd hidden it, and waited for the perfect time to strike. This was my last plan.

And it worked. I'd defeated both Messiah's Divine Judgment spell and his invincible shield! "This ends now!" I swung the Hero's Sword once more.

"Uwaaaahh!" Messiah's screams echoed across the fields.

The scream quickly stopped, and silence came. There was no one there to sound the bell to celebrate my victory. Maybe that's why I was still nervous, and why I was still gripping the hilt of the sword tightly.

Please, anyone, just let this be over! I don't know if anyone heard my plea, but...

"Why?" Messiah whispered. My invisible blade was at his neck, and a tiny bit of blood was dripping off it.

"I don't know how, but you broke my wards. I can feel it. So why don't you defeat me?"

"That's just how I do things. Unless, that is, you're not willing to admit defeat." There was nothing less normal than murder, of course. I glared at Messiah in one final bluff.

"Fine. I lose."

Now, thanks to the contract we'd made before the battle, Messiah could never go after Satsuki again. Her parents would be freed, too, and that would be the end of that.

I finally relaxed my grip on the sword. I wanted to drop to the ground in relief, but I couldn't yet. There was still one last story to take care of.

▽

I opened my eyes, and saw the council's chairman before me, looking a little shocked.

"You really can teleport with this thing, huh?" Iris's father was staring at

Satsuki's cell phone, seemingly impressed. Of course, it wasn't high technology; it was a magic spell cast on the phone. But I didn't have time to explain all that.

"Chairman."

"I know. I'll open a line to planet Satamonia immediately." I'd already told him part of our plan, and he left the room and started to lead us down the hall.

We'd hurried back to planet Finerita using magic instead of the spaceship to keep King Satamonia from trying to cheat. It was possible that he'd drop another asteroid, or that this time he might try to attack planet Finerita. There was no telling what a guy like him could do when he was on the ropes.

"Do you have that information ready?" Iris's dad asked as we headed up the Owaria tower in the open elevator.

"Of course. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here."

"That's right. You may not look it, but it seems you're a man who does what he says he'll do. Otherwise, you wouldn't have made it back here alive."

"That's a compliment, right?" It kind of felt like an insult.

"By the way," he said as he glanced behind me. "It seems like you've got another girl with you?"

Wait, why did he suddenly seem thirty percent sterner than he was a moment ago?

"Well, I needed her."

"I was surprised when your childhood friend, Satsuki, appeared. I guess you're popular with lots of girls besides Iris."

"Huh? Nah, Harissa just wants to pay me back for some help I gave her, and I hate to keep saying it, but Satsuki is just my childhood friend. And the whole 'lovers' thing with Iris was just an excuse, too. I'm not popular with any girls."

"Hmph." For some reason, he put his hand up to his temple and sighed. "My daughter certainly picked a tough one," he whispered.

"Rekka's so dense, he's going to cause an interstellar war after all." R nodded, her pose matching the chairman's.

What was all this about?

At last, we arrived at the Owaria's round table on the top floor. The lights were lowered, and I could see the bitter face of King Satamonia on the wall monitor. When his blurry eyes saw me, blood vessels popped up on his face like a toad.

"Boy! You..."

"Eeyaaaaah! It's a f-f-f-frog-pig monster!" Harissa screamed and fell back on her butt the instant she saw King Satamonia.

"Mgrrg... Wh-Wha?" King Satamonia was interrupted, and could do nothing but open and close his mouth.

"Ghuhh... heh-heh-heh..." For some reason, we all found this really funny, and it was hard to hold back laughter. Iris was on the verge of busting a gut, and Satsuki had her hand over her mouth to stop herself as best she could.

"King Satamonia, I'm sorry to keep you waiting." The chairman, the only one of us who wasn't about to start laughing, motioned for the girls to sit.

I stayed standing in a place where I could glare right at King Satamonia's ugly mug.

The skinny chief of staff was still standing next to him. He knew how to keep his short-tempered king under control. The meteor last time had basically been his idea.

This time, I wouldn't let him win. I would end things right here.

I started off the conversation. "King, I think you know this already, but I won our game. You have to give up on Iris."

Just like I suspected, King Satamonia wasn't willing to give up that easily. He stared at me silently. He was just like politicians back on Earth. Even when he was clearly in the wrong, he still wasn't going to admit it.

But the fact was, he'd lost. His face just turned a purplish red while he said nothing.

The skinny chief of staff stepped forward. "There's no need for us to keep such a bargain."

“Oh?” I readied myself to face my real enemy, the skinny man. “I guess the great space king’s not that great, huh? He can’t even keep his promises.”

“It was our king who was the first to propose to the lady Iris. You came along and proposed your funny little game, and our great king simply played along with you for his own amusement. Of course, this doesn’t actually nullify the marriage.”

“Th-That’s right!” King Satamonia regained his good cheer, but I was ignoring him. My opponent here was the chief of staff.

“So you’re not going to give up on Iris?”

“Of course not. There’s no reason for my liege to do so.”

“No reason, huh?” So if he did have a reason, that meant he’d give up.

If King Satamonia was really in love with Iris, the reason didn’t matter. I still hadn’t experienced it for myself, but if you were willing to give up on someone, you weren’t really in love with them. You were just greedy.

I couldn’t let him have Iris.

“Satsuki, give it to me.”

“Right. I’ve made it easy enough for even you to understand it.”

“Thanks... though that sounds kind of mean.” Satsuki wasn’t against saving Iris, but she looked unhappy. Did they really not get along that much?

“Dense as wood,” R said.

Putting that aside, I took the pile of papers that Satsuki handed me and started to read from the top of the list. “Galactic Year Grigory 707. Dispatching the Seventh Fleet to the third planet of the Oraul System, unregistered galaxy 305748.”

“What?!” The thin man’s eyes went wide as he stared at the papers in my hands.

I kept reading from the list. This was a list of all of King Satamonia’s misdeeds. Satsuki had used her magic to find them, and Iris had put the most important of them in a list. Unfortunately, I didn’t understand half the words on the list, but I

got the hint that he was up to some pretty wicked things.

“You bastard...” Iris’s father, who had been unfailingly polite to King Satamonia so far, was smashing his fists into the table in rage.

The king and his chief of staff had turned to a pale purple. Every evil deed they’d ever hidden was coming to light.

“Boy...” The chief of staff glared at me with a twisted expression on his face.

“You know what it means that I’ve got this, right? Give up on Iris.”

“Do you have proof?”

“Nope. But I’m sure that if somebody had this list, they could find some. Wouldn’t you agree?” If I had Satsuki look, I could find physical evidence, too.

But it wasn’t good to go too far with this. He was the leader of one of the biggest militaries in the Galactic Federation. If I pushed him too far, he would explode.

What was important was to focus on getting what I wanted. Even without proof, this would surely damage King Satamonia’s standing in the Galactic Federation. It might be enough to turn the whole Federation against him. And what’s more, he had no idea how I’d gotten it. That meant he’d be feeling paranoid.

“From now on, you leave Iris, planet Finerita, and of course, Earth and us, alone. If you can do that, I won’t turn this list over to the Galactic Federation.” Now all that was left was for skinny there to decide which was more important: his king’s selfish desire to marry someone, or the chance of damaging his planet’s political position.

“My liege, I recommend we withdraw for the day.”

“Wh-What?! But...” The king tried to insist, but the skinny man shook his head.

“That list has the potential to destroy our whole nation. Surely a wise king such as yourself can recognize its dangers.”

“I... Hmm... you’re right, yes.” The chief of staff’s flattery improved the king’s mood, and he smiled what he must have thought was a magnanimous smile.

“Boy, out of respect for your desperate pleas, I will withdraw my proposal. Be grateful to me! Gwahahahaah!” The screen turned off, and the lights in the room came back up.

“Whew.” I’d been standing for so long, but at last I could relax. I collapsed into a nearby chair. Actually, I’d been hurt, too. No more. I couldn’t even stand up anymore.

Come to think of it, everything had happened in a single day. People from the future, people from other worlds, mages, aliens... How many people had I met in the last day? This wasn’t normal at all.

R, who had been with me the whole time, was floating upside down and giving me a lazy salute, just like when we’d met. “Good work. I’m amazed you’re still alive.”

Don’t act like you’d be happier to see me dead.

But that didn’t matter. I just wanted to sleep. I wanted to sleep right now. I had school tomorrow, but if I went to sleep now I could rest for seven hours. Yeah... time to sleep. Let us all master the path of sleep.

“REKKA!”

“Gwargh?!” But that wasn’t going to happen.

Iris, her cheeks flush with joy, jumped on my lap and began to give me a bone-shattering hug.

“Rekka! Rekka! Rekka! Thank you, Rekka! I’m free now! I can stay with you as much as I want!”

No, um... my bones are literally about to shatter. Stop hugging me with all the force of a being several times stronger than any Earthling, please? Oh, I think I can see a field of flowers...

“Hey! Get away from Rekka!” Then Satsuki joined in, pulling on my collar to get me away from Iris.

Wait, you’re strangling me! I’m going to die! *I’m going to die!*

“Th-That’s right! Sir Rekka is my hero!” And now Harissa was pulling on my ankles! It felt like I was going to be torn apart.

Ow... wait, I’m really going to pass out...

Epilogue & Prologue 2: Is This a Happy Ending?

“So what’s the plan?” R said.

“Hell if I know,” I said, slumped face-down on my desk.

My long, busy day was finally over, and I’d gone back to being a normal high school student, but now I had another problem. It began right after Iris had given us a ride back to Earth in her spaceship and dropped us off.

▽

“Aah! Wait, how am I supposed to get back to Aburaamu?!” Harissa was the first to yell.

“Just use the same spell you used to get us here.”

“I know how to summon and send someone back to Earth, but I don’t know how to open the world channel from this side!”

“Wh-What?!” To be honest, I didn’t know what the difference was, but if she said so, she was probably right. That was a problem, then.

“My red thread is gone... do you have a spare?”

“I do, but you can’t use it without someone to give it to...”

“I see...” What should we do? At this rate, Harissa wouldn’t be able to go home.

“Poor Harissa, huh? She’s got no place to live here, and of course, no money. Guess she’ll just have to die in the street, huh?” R whispered in my ear.

I needed to find a way to get her home, but before that, I needed to make sure she’d be okay. “Harissa, do you want to live at my place until we find a way to get you back to Aburaamu?”

“Huh? C-Can I?” Harissa suddenly perked up, as if something very exciting had happened.

“Hey!”

“Rekka!”

For some reason, both Iris and Satsuki were glaring at me, but Harissa didn’t hear either of them. She was grabbing my shirt and asking me over and over again if it was really okay. At this rate, she was going to ruin my clothes.

“Of course it’s okay. I was the one who asked you to come. So of course I’m going to take responsibility for that.”

“R-Responsibility!” Harissa’s cheeks turned crimson. I didn’t know why that word turned her into a tomato up to her ears, but at least it didn’t seem to upset her.

And for some reason, the two girls behind me got even more upset.

“What? I’m not letting that happen!” Iris said.

“Me neither. I can’t let my childhood friend turn into a lolicon,” Satsuki said.

“Who are you calling a lolicon?!” I screamed.

“Harissa’s obviously younger than you.”

“I’m thirteen years old! I can get married whenever I want!” Harissa said happily.

I guess marriageable age in Aburaamu is thirteen. But wait... That wasn’t what we were talking about!

“That’s right! Harissa can stay at my place.” Satsuki came up with a good suggestion.

“That’s it!” I agreed.

But...

“No! I want to live with Sir Rekka!” Her idea was eventually shot down by Harissa’s fierce opposition.

“I’ll just have to live with Rekka, too!”

“What are you talking about?!”

Iris started acting weird in the middle of it, and we never did come to a good conclusion.

“There’s no better option, okay? Harissa doesn’t have a place to go. Satsuki’s got her parents to think about, but I live alone. So it makes more sense for her to say with me.”

“That’s right!”

“...”

“...”

Only Harissa seemed happy about it. The other two seemed disgusted.

“I swear I’m not going to do anything weird, okay?” Not that I had any clue why I had to swear that.

“Just so we’re clear, I’m going to come and make sure you’re not doing anything weird.” Satsuki was insistent.

“Right...” I didn’t even have the energy left to argue.

With Harissa's problem finally solved, we said our goodbyes to Iris.

"Yeah... See you later." She said goodbye much more easily than I expected, then got back in her spaceship and flew beyond the horizon. Come to think of it, Iris had gotten quiet halfway through the conversation, as if she was thinking about something. But I was too tired to wonder what it was.

"Okay. I'm going to bed, Satsuki. See you tomorrow... or today, I guess. See you at school."

"Yeah. Try to get at least a little sleep, okay?" Satsuki and I said our goodbyes, and we each headed for home.

I was too tired to do anything else, so I showed Harissa to my parents' room and then dived into bed.

Ah, damn... I'm going to fall asleep right away. I'm going to fall asleep in five seconds.

"Rekka, Rekka."

"Please... just let me... sleep."

R was saying something, but I knocked her away and closed my eyes.

I'd just had the longest day of my life. It wasn't my fault if I overslept a little, and it wasn't my fault if I went back to sleep after that. And it wasn't my fault if I was late, so good night.

"REKKA! WAKE UP!"

"Uwah?!" Suddenly, someone yanked off my blanket and rolled me out of bed.

R couldn't touch physical objects, and Harissa didn't know what time school started, so who woke me up? I found the answer as soon as I opened my eyes.

"S-Satsuki?"

"Get up already. You're going to be late." Satsuki was in my room like it was the most normal thing in the world, wearing the high school uniform I hadn't gotten to see her in yesterday. It made her look a lot more grown up, somehow.

"Huh? No, wait... why are you in my room? What about the locks?"

"Uncle Jigen gave me a key. He said to keep an eye on his wayward son, so he

didn’t get too out of hand while he was gone.”

“That stupid old man!” Why didn’t he tell me sooner?! What if I’d let my guard down and left a bunch of embarrassing magazines lying around my room?! Fortunately, I’d been able to avoid that this time, but from now on, I’d have to be careful. Particularly since it would be so much worse to let my childhood friend see them than my family.

“So you did sleep in a different room than Harissa?”

“Of course.”

“Good. Then I don’t have to use my magic.” What kind of magic would she have used on me if I’d slept in the same room? This might be worse than living with my parents.

“Hahh...”

“Don’t start your morning off with a sigh.”

“Whose fault is that? Oh, right. Did your parents come back?”

“Yeah. They’re fine. Both of them are doing better than I expected.”

“I see. Glad to hear it.”

“Yup. Oh, right. I made breakfast. Call Harissa and we can all have it together.”

“Oh, that’s great.” Lured by the promise of food, I quickly changed into my uniform and went downstairs with Harissa.

I’d put her clothes in the wash, so she was still wearing my mom’s pajamas that I’d lent her yesterday. They were way too big.

“We need to get you some clothes too, Harissa.”

“Y-Ywwweaahh...” Harissa yawned as she spoke. Maybe she had low blood pressure in the mornings.

After we both washed our faces in the same sink, we lined up at the dinner table. The table was lined with rice, grilled salmon, and miso soup. It was a real Japanese breakfast.

“Let’s eat!” We all put our hands together, and then started to use our chopsticks.

“Man, this is great stuff, Satsuki. You’re such a good cook.”

“It’s really good! I’m glad I came to this world!”

“Thanks,” Satsuki grinned.

“I’ll come and cook for you from now on, so if you have any requests, let me know, okay?”

“Huh? Every day?” Harissa and I said in unison.

Satsuki’s eyes narrowed. “Is that a problem?”

“Nope!”

“No!”

We had no choice but to obey. But for some reason, this didn’t feel like the end.

And after Satsuki and I left Harissa behind and arrived at our homeroom, I found out I was right.

“Ahem... I know this is sudden, but I’d like to introduce a transfer student.”

“Hi, everybody! I’m Iris!” Iris stepped out from behind the teacher, a dazzling smile on her face.

“All right, let’s find a place for you to sit.”

“I’d like to sit next to Rekka!”

“All right, I suppose.”

Hey, teacher! Stop her!

Iris hummed a happy tune as she moved her seat to the left of mine. Satsuki, by the way, was sitting to my right. She had a much scarier look on her face than she’d had this morning. I wanted to run away.

“Good to see you again, Rekka.”

“Y-Yeah...”

“You too, Satsuki.”

“...Yeah.”

Hey, don’t glare at each other across me! How come you two get along so badly? I can see the sparks flying between you.

“Hey, Iris. Why are you still on Earth? Didn’t you go back to planet Finerita?”

“I asked Daddy for help, and he got me all kinds of stuff. He owes me after what happened with King Satamonia, so it was pretty easy to convince him to let me go to school on Earth.”

I could just see the frown on his face when she asked him. But why come all the way to Earth? She blushed when I asked her.

“Aw, you know why! I’m training to be a wife! A W-I-F-E!”

“Whose wife? And get off me!”

“Your wife, of course! You told me you fell in love with me at first sight, right?”

“That was just to piss off King Satamonia... and wait, I can feel your breasts! Get off me!”

“Nope! Not happening!”

“Please!”

The whole class is staring at me! I hate sticking out! And Satsuki has this really creepy look in her eyes! So do the rest of the boys in the class!

“Iris, please get away from Rekka.”

“No.” Iris ignored Satsuki and started to press her— Guys, you know it’s wrong to push away a girl, right? It’s not just that I’m giving into this soft temptation, right? Well, of course, nobody was going to understand that.

“Give me a break...”

Looking just at what had happened, I’d ended up living with a girl, and my childhood friend was coming over every morning to wake me up, and I’d just met a beautiful girl who’d transferred into my class. So why did I feel so exhausted? Someone, help me...

▽

So basically, this whole thing was my fault, and R’s fault.

“Ahem... As I explained before, the War of All was started by the girls that you saved, but actually, not all of them participated in the war. Some of them agreed to give up on you and withdrew, so only about eighty percent of the extant heroines participated in the War of All. However, my coming to you has caused you to be caught up in a story where you save the future by choosing someone from among the girls you met. In other words, as long as you are the protagonist of my story, all girls you encounter will be considered a part of my story, and all their stories will be treated as events in my own. Thus, any of the heroines who would withdraw on their own will disappear, and all the others will gather to you.”

“What?”

“Oh, you didn’t understand that? Hmm... I suppose I’ll have to dumb it down. Let me put this in a way that even your tiny brain can understand.” R shook her head dramatically and stuck her index finger right in front of my nose.

“Say goodbye to your gray life of loneliness, and hello to a harem, filled with love, lust, and sweet romance!”

“I don’t understand at all...” I dropped my head down onto the table. “Basically, until I commit to a girl, more girls are going to keep showing up, right?”

“Great news, huh, Rekka? Every man wants a harem, right?”

“Shut up!”

Damn. The whole class was looking at me. Nobody else could see R, so from their perspective, I was just slamming my head down on the desk and screaming into thin air. All the exhaustion from yesterday came rushing back to me.

Satsuki, Iris, Harissa... and R. A harem? Just the four of them were running me ragged. Any more and I was going to get a hole in my stomach!

“I just want one girl, like a normal person.”

“Then hurry up and pick one.”

“It’s not that easy...”

It was time for break. The last class was gym, so it would take some time for

the girls to finish changing and come back to the classroom. This was one of the few times of the day I had to rest, and I needed to get some rest while I could. But as I went to close my eyes, the door to the classroom suddenly flew open with a bang.

“Sir Rekka! I got a little lost, but a very nice person told me the way here, and I’ve managed to successfully bring you your lunch!” Harissa came into the classroom, cheerfully swinging a bag with a lunchbox inside.

I was glad she didn’t get lost, but... I really wish she hadn’t shown up at school in her pajamas. I really wish she’d stop calling me “Sir Rekka,” too.

Then Satsuki and Iris showed up.

“What’s Harissa doing here?” Satsuki was very calm, but her eyes were locked on Harissa’s lunchbox. By the way, if my memories were right, Satsuki had made us both lunches this morning in the kitchen.

“Rekka, I’m hungry after exercising, too. Let’s eat!” Iris, however, was completely oblivious.

And of course, it was still fourth period.

The alien and the girl from another world began to argue about who was going to eat with me. Instead of trying to stop them, Satsuki joined in.

I would’ve preferred to eat alone, but... for some reason, I ended up having to decide who I wanted to eat with. But of course, I couldn’t do that, so I ran out of the classroom like a scared rabbit.

“Wait!”

“Wait!”

“Wait!”

I could hear their footsteps coming after me.

“Oh dear. You’re just like the protagonist of a romantic comedy,” R said.

“Whose fault is that?!”

This wasn’t the everyday life I knew! But this was my new daily life.

“Someone, anyone, save me from this!” As I ran down the hallway as fast as I

could, I screamed out an SOS to any super-hot hero princes who might be living somewhere in this world. But of course, deep down, I knew there weren't any.

Gyah!

—Fin—

Afterword

Greetings to both new readers and those of you who've followed me from my last series. It's me, Namekojirushi.

For this work, I've decided to write something different than I usually do. It's similar to the "shibari" or "challenge run" play style you see sometimes in action games and RPGs, where you try to beat the game without using healing or powerful items. I don't mean that I'm physically tying myself up when I write it. A few seconds after I wrote that, I said, "Ouch," and stared at the screen.

While this afterword might not be off to the best start, we've got a little more to go. Put simply, this is a story where the hero and a girl from the future work together to resolve a giant super-dimensional catfight involving childhood friends, princesses, country girls, mages, aliens, people from the future, psychics, people from other worlds, et cetera, et cetera.

That's a bit of an exaggeration, but if you've read the book already you should understand what I'm saying, right? If you haven't, try to guess which parts of that I made up. Then, head right to the cash register to buy the book.

Huh? I thought I was almost done, but I'm not. I guess I have fill up two pages with this afterword. Last time it was only one page. That's double! Double! Since the work I have to do is now *doubled* (for emphasis), I'd like to move on to thank yous and apologies.

Thanks to Mr. Nanbu, who gave me valuable encouragement while I was putting together the plot. You can treat me a little harsher, you know? I don't mean in an S&M kind of way; I mean during our meetings.

Thanks to Nao Watanuki, who understood exactly what I was trying to get at with my rather awkward prose, and even drew in backgrounds to fill in all the details. You even designed the clothing and the props and all the other stuff, and I practically forced you to do most of the work. I can't sleep with my feet facing you anymore. I should be praying to you five times a day.

And thanks to my friend F, who helped me come up with the names, as well as those who offered encouragement and advice while I was writing my next work.

And lastly, thank you so much to the reader, who picked up this book. If there's another volume, I'll do my best on it, so I hope to see you there.

お目に留めて下さってありがとうございます。

初めまして、和狸ナオと申します。この度HJ文庫様では初めて挿絵を描かせて頂きました。お気に入りはいじらしいハリッサとワープウォッチ、登場人物達の魅力を少しでも絵でお伝えできるよう願いつつ、読者様にもお気に入りのキャラなど見つけて頂けましたら一とても嬉しいです。

最後になめこ先生、担当編集様方ありがとうございました！

和狸ナオ拝

Illustrator's Note:

Thanks for taking the time to read this. I'm Nao Watanuki. This is my first job doing art for HJ Bunko. My favorites are the cute little Harissa and the Warp Watch. I hope that I've managed to bring out some of the charm of the characters, and it would make me very happy if you found a character you liked.

Lastly, thanks to Mr. Nameko and the editors.

Nao Watanuki

Background Text:

I'm at my limit! (Beta) Nao Watanuki Laser Gun - Slim and simple so it fits in a belt

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I Saved Too Many Girls and Caused the Apocalypse: Volume 1

by Namekojirushi

Translated by Adam Lensenmayer Edited by Alicia Ashby

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